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USONIA II

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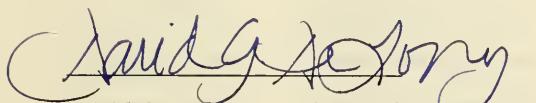
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INTRODUCTION

My first impression as I walked through Pleasantville, New York's neighborhood of forty-eight Usonian houses, was of the intimate atmosphere created by the narrow curving roads under a canopy of trees; each house tucked away in its own little forest. Intrigued by this development, I discovered it was a 1950's co-operative organized by David Henken, planned by Frank Lloyd Wright, and brought to fruition by the residents. Work at the town's Land Records Department showed that several residents shared surnames; was this some kind of family enclave in the woods? No, only a few members of the community are related, but the residents do describe the forty-eight households as one large extended family. The chain of title research also showed that this was a stable community; only thirteen houses have had a change in ownership and six of those were transfers to second generation Usonians.

Secondary sources on Wright and his Usonian houses offered very little information on the site. Why was Pleasantville not discussed in the books about Frank Lloyd Wright? It could be that the project is overshadowed by his larger works of the 1950's, that he designed only three of the houses in Usonia II ¹, or that there just had not been a complete study of the area. Whatever the reason, it has allowed me to fill a necessary niche in architectural research. This paper acts as an introduction to the topic, to be supplemented by the archive of written and oral materials that has been collected by an original resident, Roland Reisley. His primary information on the community is an important document and in

time Reisley will write about his Usonian experiences and those of his neighbors.

Turning to primary sources, I was fortunate to be able to interview several residents who were original owners. Due to scheduling conflicts, interviewing all the members of Usonia was a Sisyphean task, so I developed a survey which was sent to forty-four additional residents. Twenty-two were returned, many with two- or three-page responses, full of good leads for more research.

Mildred Resnick, an original resident and widow of Usonia II architect Aaron Resnick, made the generous donation of her husband's drawings to Columbia University's Avery Archives. Assisted by Janet Parks, the curator of architectural drawings, I was able to view the Aaron Resnick Collection and Frank Lloyd Wright's Pleasantville drawings in the Avery Archives.

A third source of primary information was the Getty Center for the History of Arts and the Humanities, whose archives contain letters between Mr. Wright and the residents of Usonia II. Wright's own texts and articles provided the needed background to the development. By comparing his motivations with that of other 1950's suburbs, it was clear that Pleasantville's community is noteworthy among its contemporaries. It represents the less traveled of two paths leading to 1950's suburban developments, these being the Garden City (1898) and Broadacre City (1934). Ebenezer Howard's model for the Garden City underlies American suburbs of the 1920's. Although faced with the same challenge as early suburban planners, Frank Lloyd Wright offered a variation with his Broadacre City. This approach, not seen as often as those motivated by Howard's ideas, was rarely realized, and nowhere else was the complex as large

as the Pleasantville project. Usonia II is similar to its fellow suburbs in that it incorporates houses with a natural setting, the residents are dependent upon cars, and it was a response to the growing need for affordable family housing. There must be an effort made to preserve Usonia II as a way to educate others about the co-operative movement of the 1950's, the lesser known works of Wright, and the second influence on American suburbs.

The completion of this thesis is due in part to the thoughtful advice and editing of David De Long and Ruth Durack. I also want to thank the members of the University of Pennsylvania's Stouffer College House, my family, friends, and especially Rob, for putting up with me during these trying thesis times. Finally, a special thanks goes to the founders of Usonia II, whose courage and persistence in this living experiment resulted in a successful suburban community.

CHAPTER ONE : PREWAR SUBURBS IN THE UNITED STATES

THE ANGLO-AMERICAN TRADITION

During the 1920's, the United States saw a rapid increase in suburban communities that featured green spaces around the residences. These American settlements were patterned after European and nineteenth American models, the most well known being Ebenezer Howard's Garden City (fig. 1.1). Motivated by overcrowding, rampant disease, and the aesthetic coarseness of nineteenth century London, this English social theorist sought to create a healthy city that would exhibit the positive attributes of both town and country. As discussed in Howard's book, *Garden Cities of To-morrow* (1898), the resulting city was a series of concentric rings emanating from a central park around which civic and institutional functions were clustered. Residences were separated from industry by further green space, and the entire town was ringed by farm units and cow pastures. The Garden City was to have a density of thirty people per acre, offering the residents a self-sufficient community near an urban center. In one of the actual sites where Howard's theories were put into practice, Welwyn, England, the density fell to four people per acre.¹ Here he proposed housing surrounded by open space and a lower population density, setting a precedent

which was followed by later suburbs of the Anglo-American tradition.

This late nineteenth century practice of combining a vegetated environment and new planned developments made its way across the Atlantic Ocean in the next decades with Forest Hills Gardens, Sunnyside Gardens, and Radburn. These sites represent the third wave of suburban communities in the United States; the first housing the upper class. "Planned suburbs of the antebellum years had been rare and exclusive havens for the wealthy, who could afford leisurely trips into town in their own horse-drawn carriages."² These developments featured curved streets, a characteristic that set suburbs apart from urban areas. Beginning with Philadelphia in 1682, most American cities chose to organize themselves in a regular grid. "The carving of the nation into a giant gridiron culminated in the Homestead Act of 1862, which divided each square mile into quarter sections of 160 acres, all bordered by straight lines."³ Planners of mid-nineteenth century suburbs rejected the rigidity of grids for less formal winding roads. Frederick Law Olmsted's 1868 design of Riverside, Illinois featured "curved roadways...to 'suggest and imply leisure, contemplativeness, and happy tranquility; the grid, according to Olmsted, was 'too stiff and formal for such adornment and rusticity as should be combined in a model suburb."⁴

A second phase of suburban growth was linear and housed members of the working middle class.

For the first time in the history of the world, middle-class families in the late nineteenth century could reasonably expect to buy a detached home on an accessible lot in a safe and sanitary environment. Because streetcars were quick and inexpensive, because land was cheaper in suburbs than in cities, and because

houses were typically put up using the balloon-frame method, the real price of shelter in the United States was lower than in the Old World.⁵

Communities of the 1870's developed around public transportation lines, which earned them the name of 'streetcar suburbs.'

A third wave of developments is marked by a decreased dependence on public transit and the growing importance of the automobile. The age of the motor car meant that no longer was the car just for weekend adventures, but rather a way to commute to work and now one could live miles from downtown. The popularity of car ownership in the United States is illustrated by the statistic that "motor vehicle registration jumped from 9 million in 1920 to 20 million in 1930."⁶ Communities were able now to readily entice urbanites beyond the city limits, so that "two years after the First World War the total suburban population surrounding cities of 50,000 or more topped 15 million. Over 15 percent of the total national population had become suburban."⁷ Besides the shift in transportation modes and town planning coupled with green spaces, suburban growth in America was also a response to the growing emphasis on the family. Statistics show that families of the 1920's were again growing; "between 1871 and 1875, there were approximately 3.5 children per woman in the United States at that time. This figure dropped to 2.2 children per woman between 1906 and 1910. By 1955 the figure jumped up again to 3.3 children."⁸

While the average American family size was increasing, suburbs such as Forest Hills Gardens (1912) were being designed in the manner of Howard's

Garden City. The Russell Sage Foundation developed this "railroad suburb, some 9 miles from Manhattan, where Grosvenor Atterbury's plan is clearly derivative from Chicago's Riverside and London's Bedford park."⁹ Located in Queens, New York, this development (fig. 1.4) was divided by three wide main streets that directed traffic through the community and several secondary roads, lined with large front lawns, which were narrower and quieter than the thoroughfares.¹⁰ Forest Hills Gardens was created to harmonize houses and open spaces, and was a predecessor to other developments designed in the Anglo-American tradition during the next decade.

In Gwendolyn Wright's work *Building The Dream*, she devotes an entire chapter to planned residential communities of the 1920's and the goal of housing the family unit. This was seen as a national priority by President Hoover who viewed "stable homes [as] the bulwark of good citizenship. Private homes encouraged individuality; and residential construction, together with real-estate investments, played key roles in the national economy."¹¹ The advocacy of private home ownership by an American president dates back as far as Jefferson. He examined the issue, "How could Americans create an environment that protected the respect of order, self-sufficiency, and spirituality they held common, without imposing on the freedom of each individual and each family to live as they pleased? The answer was the concept of the model home."¹² In order to house the twentieth century representatives of American morality while simultaneously assisting the nation's economy, "a broad coalition of developers and realtors, architects and builders, government officials and

sociologists, interior decorators and housewives, union leaders and urban reformers, engineered the residential patterns of the 1920's.¹³ One organization created at this time was New York's City Housing Corporation, which commissioned architects Clarence Stein and Henry Wright to design Sunnyside Gardens (1924-28) and Radburn, New Jersey (1928).¹⁴

The plans for Sunnyside Gardens in Queens (1924-28) emphasized the family unit in a natural setting, in the tradition of Howard's planning principles. The design of Sunnyside Gardens (fig. 1.2) continued the city's grid and grouped houses to allow for central courtyards with the buildings occupying only thirty percent of the block.¹⁵ The "large interior courtyards,...were co-operatively owned and maintained. Each group of residents decided how to use their court: for common playgrounds or, in later years, dividing it into conventional backyards."¹⁶ It was viewed as "a model suburb of row houses and detached dwellings,...[which sought] to balance the public and the private, they provided communal yards and small private gardens, uniform architecture and personalized brick detailing an each house."¹⁷ While this development offered residents an alternative to city dwelling, it was not taken as a model as frequently as was the team's next plan.

Stein and Wright's second project for the City Housing Corporation was Radburn, Jersey (1928) (fig. 1.3), which separated the residents from the automobile by pedestrian paths, overpasses, and tunnels. So while the car was a vital family member, one could also live in an attractive green area. All the houses had the area traditionally known as the front yard at the back of the house and

joined to communal open space; the 'back' of the house was near the street. Adjacent to the housing groups were apartment buildings, a school, and shopping center.¹⁸ Radburn residents were to be "white-collar families with children, a car, and a decent, but not high, income,"¹⁹ hoping to live in a communal atmosphere with nature, while enjoying the appurtenances of city life. This American notion differs from Howard's original intent to have garden cities act as self-sufficient towns, near a large urban center. In the Anglo-American tradition, there is more of an emphasis on the use of vegetation around house sites, which is seen in the progression from the 'suburban-like' urban areas of the 1910's to the self-contained 'park-like' suburbs of the 1920's. This strong desire for abundant park land and auto accessibility are two of the motivating factors in the prewar communities; the third is the cost.

Government financing brought owning one's own home within the reach of more and more Americans, and contributed to the spread of suburbs. Programs like the Federal Housing Administration (FHA), which was created under the National Housing Act of 1934, worked "to stimulate the moderate-cost private-housing market."²⁰ The FHA was to achieve this end through low-interest, long-term mortgages.

At that time, loans were available only for 40-50 percent of the appraised value of a house, repayable in three to five years at interest rates of 5-9 percent. The FHA, on the other hand, provided for loans of up to 80 percent of a home's value, maturities up to twenty years, and amortization at 5-6 percent, payable by small monthly installments. Bankers who agreed to the FHA terms were guaranteed recovery of a certain sum from the government in the event of default.²¹

This financing, in many cases, made buying a home cheaper than renting. In 1939, the FHA sponsored a development of tract houses near Wilmington, Delaware. "The Wilmington Construction Company was able to offer the home for \$5,150. The FHA mortgage guarantee meant that purchasers needed only \$550 for a down payment and an incredible \$29.61 monthly charge for twenty-five years to the bank."²² The incentive was clear: why live in the city if the suburbs are more spacious, more vegetated, allow for private home ownership, and are also less expensive?

The federal government was not only involved in providing the financial means to purchase a home, it was also involved in the planning of suburbs. The three Greenbelt Towns (1935-38) were self-contained satellite communities sponsored by the Resettlement Administration (RA), a New Deal program. The goal of the project was described by an RA official, Rexford G. Tugwell, as follows, "My idea was to go just outside centers of population, pick up cheap land, build a whole community, and entice people into them. Then go back into the cities and tear down whole slums and make parks of them."²³ These new towns offered residents housing, shopping, schools, employment opportunities, and recreation space. This model did not become popular because of the limited potential for growth, if the greenbelt was to be maintained. Moreover their proximity to Washington D.C., Cincinnati, and Milwaukee made property values climb as the land was needed for highways and further growth of the cities. The RA was dissolved in 1938 and following War World II, the houses, land and public facilities were sold to individuals.²⁴ These events signaled the end of govern-

ment planned autonomous garden cities, but not the government's interest in supplying citizens the financial means of home ownership.

Ironically, the FHA and Frank Lloyd Wright's model of Broadacre City were created in the same year, 1934. The FHA was to be a major barrier in the way of Wright's new ideas of architectural design and the use of materials. His planned communities were rarely realized due to the criticism of the FHA, which controlled the residents' ability to obtain mortgages.²⁵ Wright's proposal for a truly American architecture varied from his contemporaries' working in the Anglo-American tradition, who were designing new towns and reorganizing urban/suburban areas. Instead, Wright was applying his theories of organic architecture, including decentralization, to create a union between city and country. He opted not to bring portions of the country into the city, but rather to spread the city over the entire countryside.

WRIGHT'S BROADACRE CITY

Frank Lloyd Wright (1867-1959) was an architect noted for innovations in architecture and regional design. His principles of organic architecture came from a variety of sources, including the Froebel block system of learning spatial relationships, the works of the New England Transcendentalists, and his mentor Chicago architect Louis Sullivan.²⁶ According to Wright's organic design theory the house and nature were to be one. "A building should appear to grow easily from its site and be shaped to harmonize with its surroundings if Nature is manifest there, and if not try to make it as quiet, substantial and organic as She

would have been were the opportunity Hers.²⁷ This approach intensifies the Anglo-American tradition; the house is not placed in nature, but grows from it, and the border between house and landscape disappears.

Wright's early- and mid-twentieth century version of regional design included his organic principles as well as incorporate purely American notions of land ownership, density, individuality, and democracy. He wrote of the United States, "this nation conceived in liberty where all men were to have equal opportunity before the law; where vast territory, riches untouched, were inherited by all the breeds of the earth desiring freedom and courageous enough to come and take domain on the terms of the pioneer."²⁸ America's wealth of land plus its brave individuals were the focus of Wright's scheme for a new city.

During a 1930 Kahn lecture at Princeton, Wright explained an alternative to the current division of land as being either urban or rural. Wright disagreed with land speculation, and said that "The only answer to life today is to get back to the good ground."²⁹ Wright asked:

Why, where there is so much idle land, should it be parceled out by realtors to families, in strips 25', 50', or even 100' wide? This imposition is a survival of feudal thinking, of the social economies practiced by and upon the serf. An acre to the family should be the democratic minimum if this machine of ours is a success!...An important feature of the coming disintegration of the Usonian city may be seen in any and every service station along the highway. The service station is future city service in embryo. Each station that happens to be naturally located will as naturally grow into a neighborhood distribution center, meeting place, restaurant, rest room, or whatever else is needed. A thousand centers as city

equivalents to every town or city center we now have, will be the result of this advance agent of decentralization. ³⁰

With each family settling on one acre, the nation would be less dense and allow the individual to decide how the land was to be developed.

Some of Wright's theories on architecture and regional design were compiled into text when he began writing, at the insistence of his wife, Olgivanna. ³¹ Wright published two books in 1932, *An Autobiography* and *The Disappearing City*. In both Wright discusses the Usonian City which will replace the 'disappearing city' of the day that he describes as: "This 'ideal' city relegates the human individual to, say, pigeon-hole 337611, shelf 522, block F, avenue A, street 127...Thus all strife is ended. The harmony of inertia obtains. Nolition [sic] has arrived! Innocuous desuetude [sic]."³² To free the unfortunate person trapped in this kind of city, Wright developed a city for the future.

Broadacre City was planned to decentralize the city horizontally and to include green spaces as well as all the necessary aspects of an American's life. "A city of native creative ability, its advantages, we hope to see, turning the capabilities of the machine spread *for* the human being, not stacked against him. We have earned good right to speak of this city of tomorrow, the city of Democracy, indulging in no double-talk, as the City of Broad Acres."³³

A model of Broadacre City (fig. 1.5) was made in 1934 by apprentices at Taliesin and funded by Edgar Kaufmann, Sr. It "measured twelve by twelve feet, eight inches and was constructed of wood at a scale of one inch to seventy-five feet. This represented four square miles of land or, as defined more traditionally,

four US Public Land Survey sections for a total of 2,560 acres. This four-square-mile area, reportedly, would accommodate about 1,400 families or dwelling units.³⁴ Wright explained that this represented the city of the future.

In the City of Yesterday ground space was reckoned by the square foot. In the City of Tomorrow growth space will be reckoned by the acre: an acre to the family. This seems a modest minimum if we consider that if all the inhabitants of the world were to stand upright together they would scarcely occupy the island of Bermuda. And reflect that in these United States there is more than 57 acres of land, each, for every man, woman, and child within its borders.

On this basis of an acre to the family architecture would come again into the service, not of the landlord, but of the man himself as an organic feature of his own ground. Architecture would no longer be merely adapted, commercialized space to be sold and resold by taximeter - no more standing room than competition demands.

Ground space is the essential basis of the new city of a new life.³⁵

The model of Wright's Broadacre City (fig. 1.6) was displayed at Philadelphia's Gimbel Brothers in January of 1951 as part of his exhibit "Sixty Years of Living Architecture." In a 1951 conversation with Oskar Stonorov, a Philadelphia architect who coordinated the exhibit, Wright defined Broadacre City as, "an attack upon the cultural lag of our society. The model attempts to show how more humane use of our vast leverage, the machine, could now be used to better advantage in order to free the citizen by way of his own architecture."³⁶ Seeking to decentralize population density and celebrate the individual, Wright proposed

his Broadacre City, but it was never fully realized.

During the years Wright was creating some of his most important designs, Fallingwater (1936-7), the Johnson Wax Building (1937-9), and the Herbert Johnson House (1938), he was also "at work on a new concept for moderate cost housing which he called the Usonian House."³⁷ His goal was to create a more democratic environment, achieved by "bringing the arts, agriculture, and industry in a harmonious whole, [then]...the artificial divisions set up between urban and rural life would be broken down."³⁸ This was to take place in a nation called Usonia.

The term Usonia is said to have been created by philosopher, Samuel Butler (1835-1902), in his novel *Erewhon* of 1872. This first person narrative centers around the travels of an English shepherd through a land where illness is criminal, machinery outlawed, and vegetables revered. Although Wright gave credit for the invention of the word Usonia to Butler, it seems not be found in the text.³⁹

In the *Architectural Forum* issue of January 1948, Wright explained the derivation of the word Usonia as follows:

In those early days when nearly everybody who wanted to build a house asked what 'style' our houses were, it would have simplified matters greatly if we could have said 'this is the Usonian Style.' But the name came much later from the great originator of the modern realistic novel, Samuel Butler. In the work he called 'Erewhon,' he pitied us for having no real name for ourselves. He suggested the word Usonia as embodying the real meaning of the word union - the States United - I as having also desirable euphony.⁴⁰

This question is still open to discussion since it is not answered, but one possibility solution is that Wright invented Usonia. John Sergeant notes in, *Frank Lloyd Wright's Usonian Houses*, that "it has been suggested that Wright picked up the name on his first European trip in 1910 when there was talk of calling the U.S.A. 'U-S-O-N-A,' to avoid confusion with the new Union of South Africa."⁴¹

While the derivation of the word is uncertain, it is known what the Usonia stands for; United States of North America and I for euphony. Wright first used the term in print in a May 1927 *Architectural Record* article, "The Architect and the Machine," "America (or let us say Usonia - meaning the United States - because Canada and Brazil are America too) is committed to the machine and is machine-made to a terrifying degree."⁴²

Usonia should not be confused with Utopia. Wright said that Usonia was not going "to join so many harmless dreams that come and go like glowing fireflies in July Meadows."⁴³ In the United States during the mid-nineteenth century there were over a hundred utopians societies, such as Robert Owen's New Harmony colony in Indiana,⁴⁴ but Wright's residential communities are not Utopian, just organic in their architecture and way of life. What typifies the Usonian house is that it "is always hungry for ground, lives by it becoming an integral feature of it."⁴⁵

In 1937, a 70-year-old Wright built his first Usonian 'style' house. This period of Wright's career, which includes building economical, organic residences, was sparked by Herbert Jacobs' request for a \$5,000 house (fig. 1.7).

After moving to Madison, Wisconsin, Jacobs had trouble finding an affordable house, and on the suggestion of a relative went to Taliesin to ask Wright if he could design his family a house.

Then, on the way out, we were - my wife and I - trying to think what is it that we can tell this great man - the architect of rich clients - what can we say that would interest him in our very small case?...Mr. Wright told us that we were the first clients that had ever asked him to build a low-cost house...Then he said, 'Do you really want a \$5,000 house? Most people want a \$10,000 house for \$5,000'...The bill I paid was for \$5,500 which included Mr. Wright's fee of \$450.⁴⁶

This modest figure is seen under a clearer light if one considers that "the average cost of a house in 1928 was \$4,937."⁴⁷ Using the price of a home during the previous decade means that this was to be a truly cost efficient residence.

Kenneth Jackson, author of *Crabgrass Frontier*, notes that the Usonian design grew as a response to the changing housing needs of prewar America.

Led by Frank Lloyd Wright, architects answered the need for simpler lifestyles and servantless domesticity by reviving Andrew Jackson Downing's nineteenth-century notion of the functional house. Wright's Usonian style of the 1930's emphasized one-story homes with low-slung roofs, carports, and generous amounts of glass. This model for the 'ranch' houses would continue to characterize suburban development after World War II.⁴⁸

In its pure form, the Usonian house was an alternative to the Tudor, Queen Anne, and Colonial Revival styles commonly reproduced in suburban developments. Although the Usonian house was a design for an entire organic way of life, it was distilled down into the ranch house and was reproduced across the

nation.⁴⁹ In a 1939 lecture Wright commented on the original Usonian house type:

Having built this house, some of my colleagues, I am told, said that this was just a stunt and that I would never build another. But, being of the opinion that to build these houses is the one most important thing in our country for an architect to do, I pledged myself to do forty of them. We are now on our twenty-seventh, and I want to assure you that there is nothing more interesting or more important in this world today than trying to put into the houses in which our typical best citizens live something of the quality of a genuine work of art; but nothing is more arduous, nothing is more exhausting and difficult.⁵⁰

Wright's promise to design forty Usonian houses underestimated the number actually built. In *The Natural House* (1954), Wright wrote, "We have built over a hundred of them now in nearly all our states."⁵¹ The figure given by Patrick Meehan, author of *Frank Lloyd Wright: A Research Guide to Archival Research*, differs from Wright's total. Meehan concluded that between 1937 and 1942, the period of Wright's career that Meehan refers to as 'Usonia', eighty-eight designs were completed. This represents a mere nine percent of his total work; among these, 54 were single family residences.⁵² John Sergeant has created five sub-categories that relate to the floor plans of Usonian houses: polliwog, in-line, diagonal, hexagonal, and raised.⁵³ The polliwog plan, as seen in the Jacobs House, reflects swirling growth that allows additions to be placed at the tail if needed. The in-line is rectangular in design, with the various rooms placed in a row. The diagonal and hexagonal types reflect the module used to design the

house, and the raised Usonian is similar to the in-line type, with the exception that the living quarters are on an upper level separated from the ground.

Seven years after the first Usonian house was built, it became the standard house type in three of Wright's prewar residential communities. In a 1939 London lecture Wright said that:

...at the moment...we are building in Broadacre style a group of eight houses on forty acres, and for whom, do you suppose? For the university professors of the State University at Lansing, Michigan. I call that heaping coals of fire on my own head but practical progress; our professors - philosophy, etc., etc., - are getting Broadacre religion too! ⁵⁴

Due to the Federal Housing Administration's opinion that the houses were unstable, only one was completed, the Goetsch-Winckler House in 1939 (fig. 1.8). Constructed near Lansing, in Okemos, Michigan, this group of homes was to be called Usonia I (fig. 1.9). The original site plan is rather simple, with the houses accessed by a road that loops around the central farm unit and caretaker's house.

Wright included plans for farms in many of his planned communities, the largest at Taliesin. In the third evening of his London Lecture series, Wright commented on the busy life at his home and studio. "There are very many things to do because we have several hundred acres of 'farm,' and in addition we are practicing architects."⁵⁵ Wright had experienced life on the farm in his youth and continued to include farms in the future plans.

I was getting to be sort of a 'Little Lord Fauntleroy' growing up there in a special school in Boston and I had long curls, finger curls that mothers like to put on

the heads of their little darlings...And when she [Wright's mother] saw this going too far, why she cut those curls from the back of my head and sent me off to my Uncle James on the farm. And Uncle James took over my education at that point. I was eleven when I went up there, And every summer up to the age of eighteen I went to the farm. And I never went to school the prim term...of my life because the farm was so much more fascinating *and instructive*.⁵⁶

At the site in Lansing, Wright's suggestion for a farm was, "eagerly taken up by the group as a step toward self sufficiency."⁵⁷ Although the future residents of Usonia I were excited about the project, the government stepped in to express its disapproval. "Government experts' opinion reported 'the walls will not support the roof; floor-heating is impractical; the unusual design makes subsequent sales a hazard."⁵⁸

Wright's 1939 design for another group of Usonian houses, Suntop Homes (fig. 1.10), met with similar disapproval. The units, also known as quadruple or cloverleaf houses, were built in Ardmore, Pennsylvania, a suburb of Philadelphia, at a cost of \$16,000. Each home was one quarter of the building's floor plan (fig. 1.11), and consisted of a basement, ground floor for the carport and living room, a mezzanine level of bed rooms and kitchen, topped by the sun terraces of the penthouse. The design's floor plan recalls Wright's St. Mark's Tower project of 1929 (figs. 1.12 & 1.13), with its cruciform core that divided each floor into four units. Ardmore's units exhibit an economy of space, the type of thoughtful planning that was Wright's hallmark. Wright's original design called for four of these structures to be built, but due to local opposition only one was realized.

When Frank Lloyd Wright, the bad boy of modern architecture, tackled the problem of low-cost housing in the suburbs, he found a solution - but Ardmore, Pa....didn't like it. This ultra-modern, four-family house has been a thorn in the side of the citizens of Ardmore for ten months now. At first petitions poured in to town officials, pointing out that the experimental house was a detriment to local property values. Then the township passed a ruling banning the building of any more of the houses like this in the locality.⁵⁹

Wright's version of the Suntop controversy was, "we are just building in Philadelphia a little group of houses called the Ardmore Experiment. That experiment could not be passed under the building codes, so we managed to have the code abrogated."⁶⁰

Ardmore's one completed multiple-house was a victory when compared with the Pittsfield, Massachusetts project for one hundred homes that was prevented from progressing past the drawing board. In August of 1941, Wright, along with other notable architects of the day - Marcel Breuer, Walter Gropius, Louis I. Kahn, Richard Neutra, Eero and Eliel Saarinen, was contacted to design public housing. Wright's assignment in this case was to create "100 dwelling units for workers at an ordnance plant producing rifles, situated in the rolling Berkshire Hills."⁶¹ Wright accepted the job saying "My country has never before called on me. If you [the chief of the Planning Section, Talbot Wegg] are serious and want me to work for you, I will do it and you will be proud of the results."⁶² The form of the houses was a cloverleaf, similar to that found in the Suntop Homes built two years earlier, but slightly larger and with a change in the levels'

uses. The progression upward went from ground floor with its living room and carport to the master bedroom and kitchen on the mezzanine, followed by the penthouse's additional bedrooms and sun deck, all beneath a roof garden (fig. 14). The sense of privacy and ownership is stressed, in this project:

No entrance to any dwelling in the group is beside any other entrance to another dwelling. So far as any individual can know, the entire group is his home. He is entirely unaware of the activities of his neighbors. There is no looking from front windows to backyards: all the private functions of family life are here independent of those of any other family. ⁶³

A third characteristic of Wright's residential designs was efficiency. "Family processes are conveniently centralized on the mezzanine next [to] the master bedroom and bath, where the mistress of the house can turn a pancake with one hand while chucking the baby into a bath with the other, father meantime sitting at his dinner, lord of it all, daughter meantime having the privacy of the front room below for the entertainment of her friends."⁶⁴ This romanticized picture of life in Pittsfield was never realized due to local politicians, who objected to a Wisconsin architect designing a Massachusetts site rather than an in-state architect. After Wright was dismissed he noted, "although the government offered to buy what I had done, I declined to sell it because I would have no positive control over execution. And so this project is still one of the best shots in our locker. In this scheme, standardization is no barrier to the quality of infinite variety to be observed in nature."⁶⁵ (fig. 1.15)

The Pittsfield, Massachusetts project and the outbreak of the Second World War mark the close of another phase in Wright's career. The years Patrick Meehan calls 'Usonia,' lead into 'New Forms and Old Friendships,' which Meehan dates between 1943 and 1949.⁶⁶ Wright continued to design residential communities featuring the Usonian house after the war; among these sites are Kalamazoo, Michigan and Pleasantville, New York. As with his developments around 1940, Wright continued to design in the spirit of Broadacre's principles, which sharply contrasted the work of his contemporaries, particularly Abraham Levitt and his sons. The communities bearing the Levitt's name were "nothing but house after house after house - all much the same, ...mass-produced 'little boxes,'"⁶⁷ while Wright's Pittsfield plan has the possibility of 'infinite variety'.

CHAPTER TWO : AMERICAN POST-WAR SUBURBS

The close of World War II signaled that Americans could once again turn their attention to the pursuit of affordable housing. The United States, however, was experiencing a housing shortage combined with postwar inflation.

"Through sixteen years of depression and war, the residential construction industry had been dormant, with new home starts averaging less than 100,000 per year."¹ This lack of housing was compounded by returning servicemen, and an increasing number of families, seeking the 'American Dream', of owning a house. To meet the increased housing demand, "The most conservative reports from the government's National Housing Agency estimated that the country needed at least 5 million new units immediately and a total of 12.5 million over the next decade."² Responding to the postwar need, housing starts began to rise due to advances in the building trade and materials, as well as financing programs such as low interest loans and co-operatives ventures.

During the 1950's, the average family size was increasing and the 1920's belief that a single-family detached house was the best setting for raising children was still part of popular mythology. The marriage rate began a sharp increase in 1940 which reached 22 per 1,000 in 1943, the highest in two decades.⁴ As households grew, "the government and industry both played up the suburban house to the families of absent servicemen, and between 1941 and 1946 some of the

nation's most promising architects published their 'dream houses' in a series in the *Ladies' Home Journal*.⁵ As more American families required housing, the government and the construction industry responded with a larger supply of housing that was affordable.

The government helped to elevate the problem of high demand for housing through a second type of financing program; the first being FHA loans. In 1944 the Servicemen's Readjustment Act created the Veterans Administration (VA), which began the veterans' mortgage guarantee program, better known as the GI Bill of Rights. This financing program enabled veterans to borrow the total appraised value of a house without a down payment.⁶ The Readjustment Act "gave official endorsement and support to the view that the 16 million GI's of World War II should return to civilian life with a home of their own."⁷ As purchasing power grew stronger, a housing boom occurred and "Single-family housing starts spurted from only 114,000 in 1944, to 937,000 in 1946, to 1,183,000 in 1948, and to 1,692,000 in 1950, an all-time high."⁸ Homes became more accessible to American families, through vertical integration of the building trade, the efficient and economical design of the Usonian house, or by citizens pooling their financial resources in co-operative ventures.

The 1950's saw a major shift in the construction industry from many, small companies to a few mass-producing builders.

Residential construction in the United States had always been highly fragmented in comparison with other industries, and dominated by small and poorly organized house builders who had to subcontract much of the work because their low volume did not

justify the hiring of all the craftsmen needed to put up a dwelling....Whereas before 1945, the typical contractor had put up fewer than five houses per year, by 1959, the median single-family builder put up twenty-two structures. As early as 1949, fully 70 percent of new homes were constructed by only 10 percent of the firms..., and by 1955 subdivisions accounted for more than three-quarters of all new housing in metropolitan areas.⁹

The large building firms of the 1950's are characterized by the work of Abraham Levitt and his sons, William and Alfred. Although most commonly associated with their three Levittown developments, Long Island (1946-47), Pennsylvania (1951), and New Jersey (1960), "the Levitts were among the nation's largest home builders even before the first Levittown."¹⁰ Through precise building organization and vertical integration, the Levitts were able "to provide the best shelter at the least price."¹¹ Each house was built following "twenty-seven distinct steps - beginning with laying the foundation and ending with a clean sweep of the new home. Crews were trained to do one job - one day the white-paint men, the red-paint men, then the tile layers."¹² The Levitts eliminated the expense of subcontractors by integrating their company vertically. "The firm made its own concrete, grew its own timber, and cut its own lumber. It also bought all appliances from wholly owned subsidiaries. More than thirty houses, went up each day at the peak of production."¹³ The mass production techniques responsible for Levittown developments include advances in materials, tools, and subdivision planning.

After bulldozing the land and removing the trees, trucks carefully dropped off building materials at

precise 60-foot intervals. Each house was built on a concrete slab (no cellar); the floors were of asphalt and the walls of composition rock-board. Plywood replaced 3/4-inch strip lap, 3/4-inch double lap was changed to 3/8-inch for roofing, and the horse and scoop were replaced by the bulldozer. New power hand tools like saws, routers, and nailers helped increase worker productivity. Freight cars loaded with lumber went directly into a cutting yard where one man cut parts for ten houses in one day.¹⁴

The planning of the Levittown communities was as regimented as the construction process. Designed in superblocks, the developments featured curvilinear streets with various fruit trees and evergreens, and row after row of Cape Cod style houses. These settlements were described by David Popenoe, author of *The Suburban Environment*, as the "First large city in the United States to be preplanned since L'Enfant laid out Washington, D.C."¹⁵ William Levitt claimed that, "We planned every foot of it - every store, filling station, school, house, apartment, church, color, tree, and shrub."¹⁶

After the planning of a Levittown was completed, then the prospective buyer had the option between three house models. "Their 1949 model had two bedrooms, a dining alcove off the living room, and a potentially expandable attic, providing seven hundred square feet of living space on a lot sixty feet by one hundred feet."¹⁷ (fig 2.1) While mass production facilitated the accommodation of the ever growing number of home buyers, the issue of standardization versus the spirit of individualism became apparent. In large planned residential projects the houses were designed first, and the family needs were made secondary. Personalized spaces and a sense of one's own place were of little

concern to the developers. The goal of owning one's own single-family detached house was so strong, however, that affordability was paramount to individuality. Lewis Mumford, commented on the greatest flaw of Levittowns and other 1950's suburbs, homogeneity;

In the mass movement into suburban areas a new kind of community was produced, which caricatured both the historic city and the archetypal suburban refuge: a multitude of uniform, unidentifiable houses, lined up inflexibly, at uniform distances, on uniform roads, in a treeless communal waste, inhabited by people of the same class, the same income, the same age group, witnessing the same television performances, eating the same tasteless prefabricated foods, from the same freezers, conforming in every outward and inward respect to a common mold, manufactured in the central metropolis, thus, the ultimate effect of the suburban escape in our own time is, ironically, a low-grade uniform environment from which escape is impossible.¹⁸

Although repetitive Levittown-type developments constituted a large portion of American 1950's suburbs, there was an alternative to be found in Usonian communities.

In 1947, while Frank Lloyd Wright's career was beginning a postwar upswing, he designed site plans for Parkwyn Village and Galesburg, both near Kalamazoo, Michigan. In the former (fig. 2.2), Wright designed four houses; the other sites were to be designed by other architects. The roadway is similar to the one in the Lansing project; the houses are grouped around one main street that makes a circle at the heart of the community. In the center of the plan there is a community building with a pool and three tennis courts. The houses would sit

within the circular plots that surround this large building, and that line the road.

Circular plots are also the main feature of the Galesburg development (fig. 2.3). This project was to contain forty houses, but only four were built. The Galesburg plan lacked the central core of Parkwyn and instead, the plots are held together by meandering roads that curve around clusters of two to five houses. Wright's use of circular lots is of great interest since it deviates from the rectangular plot found in most postwar suburbs. He explains the rationale behind them in a discussion of the Parkwyn and Galesburg projects:

These subdivisions are in line with that proposed for the unexecuted Pittsfield, Mass. housing scheme. The center of each disk of ground once located by survey and diameter given, any house owner can tell where his lot limits are. No lot line touches another wherever the scheme is perfect. All interspaces are to be planted to some native shrub like barberry or sumach, throwing a network of color in pattern over the entire tract.¹⁹

In Edgar Kaufmann, jr.'s 1969 essay, "Wright : The Eleventh Decade," he examines Wright's conscious and unconscious attempts to create a domain for living that would give Usonian security and a sense of identity, through the ownership of property:

Territory and environment are twin concepts that dominate our hopes today. In the exploration of these themes, we trust that a working relationship between man and society can be reestablished between society and the natural order. Here is the very source of Wright's architecture. From the start, as he told it, even before he became aware of his own direction, Wright struggled to formulate a particular kind of

territoriality, one more responsive to the environment than was usual, or ever had been usual, in the area of building. He called it 'the destruction of the box."²⁰

Kaufmann went on to cite the work of Glen McBride, a professor of psychology from the University of Queensland, whose 1968 paper outlined the four types of territorial behavior common among animals. They include : defended perimeter, domain center or hub, center in motion (which affects its surroundings as it moves), and center in motion forward (which reduces influence to the sides and back).²¹ Of these characteristics, Kaufmann saw that Wright's work included the first two patterns, placing greater emphasis on the second which is seen in his central hearth and living area.

As animals create a defendable territory with the hub located at the center, Wright placed the Parkwyn and Galesburg houses directly at the center of their circular plots. The notion that the land owner is aware of his property by a quick visual survey is made easier when the house is at the core of a plot that is circular.

Wright developed modular grids based on 60 and 120 degrees - hexagonal and equiangular triangles...with diagonal modules. Wright's architecture accepted the mobility of dance, it provided a structure for movement, endowing everyday existence with some of the expressive scope of ritual and ceremony. Wright's work in a sense became an architecture of happenings.

At this time points and pools of repose appeared in other of Wright's projects. Clustered circles were loosely arranged, as in the scheme for Ralph Jester's house, or regularly arranged, as are the point supports

of the newspaper plant project for Oregon as early as 1931. In the 1940's, tangential circles formed the pattern of a co-operative development scheme, each house the nucleus of its circular plot, all embedded in jointly held forest land.²²

Kaufmann shows how Wright's work with geometry shifted to include circular forms beginning in the 1920's and maturing in 1940's site plans.

The properties Kaufmann mentions that have 'jointly owned land' are the non-profit Usonian co-operatives of Galesburg and Parkwyn, which represent the growing trend to finance through co-operatives. Co-operative ventures were not invented in the 1950's, but rather revived from the 1920's, a time that had similar problems of postwar inflation and a limited supply of affordable housing.

The co-op first came into fashion after World War I during a period of inflation and shortage similar to the present. The early ones were well-financed, but the trend soon developed gold rush proportions. Inflated building on inflated land was topped off by dubious mortgage financing. The luxury co-op became a speculative operation, not only for builders, but for buyers who saw a chance for quick turnover and thus quick profits on a relatively small investment, like buying stock on margin.²³

A 1920 *Architectural Forum* article entitled "Co-operative Ownership to Meet the Present Shortage of Buildings," discusses the stimulus, financing and principles of forming a co-operative. The article lists four economic reasons for the growing interest in co-operative ventures and likens these to a dam that has blocked the usual path of the flowing housing 'stream'. Housing starts decreased

due to the high cost of building materials, transportation and labor costs, and "the resultant unwillingness of the ordinary financing organizations to provide the necessary funds for building loans and mortgage loans which are necessary in great volume to meet the building demand. As a result, this demand has assumed the proportions of a flood and is naturally seeking new channels."²⁴

One alternative channel was the co-operative ownership system that was popular after the previous war. "The reasons are not hard to find. In a period of dwelling shortage and rising prices, the co-op...looks like the answer to a builder's prayer. It eliminates the necessity of high rents, based on inflated costs and continued over many years, come good times or bad. It encourages high quality construction when most builders are cutting every possible corner."²⁵ As an answer to both builders' but also renters' prayers, the number of 1950 co-operatives grew, and "In the post-war era, many observers viewed co-operative housing as the ultimate source of shelter for practically every income group."²⁶

Although suffering from the same housing problems, these two postwar periods attracted different types of clients to their co-operatives. "Unlike their predecessors in the gilded Twenties, today's co-operative apartment houses are based on sound financing, good design, and special attention to the details of comfortable living."²⁷ The basic principle behind a co-operative venture is that a group of individuals, paying rent in advance or membership dues, create a fund for building or purchasing a site.

The members of a co-operative are able to achieve their final goal of affordable housing by avoiding the costs of speculation and developers' profits.

The property considered can be either an apartment building, office building, or a group of separate houses. There are three steps to developing a co-operative:

A group of individuals may form a stock company and purchase enough land for a building. They obtain a building on permanent mortgage, making it unnecessary for them to put up in cash more than 40 percent of the cost of the operation. When the building is completed each of the stockholders owns jointly with his associates the equity in the building. Each is his own landlord, as his ownership carries the right to the occupancy of a certain number of square feet in the building, this apartment being under a perpetual proprietary lease.²⁸

This is one type of financing plan for a co-operative, the stock company that supplies forty percent of building costs, and rental fees that provide the difference. In addition there are two other programs for organizing a co-operatively funded project. In a straight co-operative building ownership each member of the stock company is also a tenant in the project and there are no additional units for rental to non-members. The final type of co-operative is a hybrid of the first two plans; it has a stock company, offers units to renting non-members, but also requires members to pay rent.²⁹

The straight co-operative building ownership plan was the type of organization chosen by the original members of 'Usonia Homes Inc., A Cooperative,' a development of Usonian houses in Pleasantville, New York. The idea to form this co-operative is attributed to David T. Henken (1915-85) an engineer from Sunnyside, New York. His goal was to build a "co-operative community of individually designed houses with an acre of ground for each

family, about thirty miles from New York.³⁰

Henken's spirit for communal living and organic architecture is in keeping with Bruce Brooks Pfeiffer's observation that even a half century after Broadacre City's unveiling, there is still a need for it to be realized in the United States. In his book, *Frank Lloyd Wright: His Living Voice*, Pfeiffer writes,

It is high time that some fundamental radicals among us gather together the loose ends of opportunity lying waste all about us, and instead of laying more by means of them project some such sensible plan for life as our forefathers hoped and believed would be ours. It is time organic sense of the is whole seen as an entity that is now the greatest social need.³¹

David Henken was one such radical who worked with Frank Lloyd Wright and the original thirty-three members, to create Usonia II.

CHAPTER THREE : USONIA II IN NEW YORK STATE

Affordable housing was a pressing need in America during the 1950's and, as David Henken noted, "You have to remember that after the war and sex, conversations about post-war housing were the most popular."¹ Henken was a mechanical engineer from New York City, who wanted to form a co-operative in Westchester County with several friends. His idea came into focus when he saw Wright's two-month long exhibit at New York's Museum of Modern Art, which opened in November 1940. There, Henken would have seen a variety of Wright's works, but the project that intrigued him the most was Broadacre City. Henken's growing interest in organic architecture led him to approach Wright to ask for assistance in designing a co-operative community based on Broadacre City principles in New York State.² In July of 1942, Henken addressed Wright,

I am writing to ask that I may come to Taliesin and work with you. This is no sudden whim that has come to me. My belief in the brotherhood of man, in the co-operative commonwealth as a means for achieving it...has been growing in me steadily...I have thought long and calmly, and I stand ready to offer myself as an apprentice.³

In August of that same year, Henken received notice from Wright:

We have your application duly filled out in proper order and shall be glad to see you when you arrive on October First. Your wife [Priscilla] will be welcome, too,

whenever she comes. Bring with you warm outdoor sport and work clothing... your own bedding ...drawing materials and what books and records you wish...We are looking forward to seeing you and Mrs. Henken in our Fellowship family circle. I am sure you will both contribute much to our daily life.⁴

The Henkens' experience at Wright's Wisconsin home and studio was varied and included more than just architectural design. Life as a member of the Taliesin Fellowship was described by one of its charter members, Elizabeth Kassler, in her 1975 essay entitled "The Whole Man." Although Kassler was a Fellow before and after Henken (she was an apprentice from 1932 to 1933 and then between 1948 and 1949), their experiences at Taliesin are comparable:

Mr. Wright preached 'the gospel of work.' Not unlike Karl Marx in this, he considered meaningful, varied work, integrated with all of life, as the base of wholeness and creativity. Farming and cooking, cleaning and repairing, were arts as biologically valid as the design and construction of shelter, and to be pursued with the same loving care, the same search for inherent rhythm. Taliesin was devoted to the cause of architecture and to the idea that it takes an organic man to produce organic architecture. To be an architect, one must first be a man fully human in nature, an awakened man simultaneously aware of his inner being and his outward behavior and relationships; and contemplative action was the prime vehicle for the raising of consciousness....By the gospel, Taliesin life was designed as ritual support of an effort to be wholly present to the present and responsible for it.⁵

According to Edgar Tafel, Taliesin Fellow and author, the average stay at Taliesin was two years,⁶ and that is exactly how long Henken spent as an

apprentice to Wright. In 1943 the Henkens returned to New York:

...to set about organizing into a co-operative the 80 some families who had at one time been interested in the project. When they met for the first time, however, only about 40 members showed up. And when the group decided to assess each family \$100 for a membership fee and require each to save money toward the project at the rate of \$50 a month, only 12 of the original 80 remained. New people kept coming in however, while other members dropped out. By 1944 the group was well organized, was nearing its goal of 50 families, and had incorporated under the laws of New York state as a pure Rochdale co-operative.⁷

The Rochdale co-operative system was created by English weavers during the late nineteenth century; these co-operatives were based on profit sharing, democratic procedures, and common ownership of the land.⁸ In 1944, following the principles of the Rochdale pioneers, Henken's group formed a non-profit co-operative, which was affiliated with the Eastern Co-operative League, a local organization that ran a co-operative grocery. The next year the co-operative was incorporated, and from then on it bore Wright's term, Usonia.

In 1947, the co-operative purchased land in Pleasantville, New York at a tax foreclosure auction for \$20,000.⁹ Usonia II's hilly site is full of pine trees and is crossed by stone walls and streams. The 97 acres they bought had, at the turn of the century, been part of the Seabury Mastick estate.¹⁰ Pleasantville was selected from two other locations, all within a radius about forty miles from New York City, so that co-operative members could retain their jobs in Manhattan. This ring around the city has been called, "The suburban frontier, land within a

50-mile radius of centers of commerce and employment."¹¹

In addition to being forty miles for New York City, Usonia II is also ten miles from the city of White Plains and two and a half miles from Pleasantville's town center. A *House and Garden* article of 1951, "Lots are Circular in this 50-house Group," gives a concise diagram (fig. 3.1) of the amenities near Usonia II. The property, seen on a current map (fig. 3.2), has as its borders, the Kensico Reservoir to the south, and to the north, east, and west, are Bear Ridge Road, King Street, and Nannyhagen Road respectively. The selection of the site came two years after Wright's agreement to participate in Henken's planned community.

Wright's role in the Pleasantville project was described in the draft of his contract typed on 'Usonia Homes - A Cooperative, Inc.' letterhead. On this 1945 letter from Henken to Wright, Wright rewrote his role in the project in pen. Henken had hoped that Wright would design a large portion of the houses but he was too busy with other postwar residences.¹² Instead of designing the bulk of the houses, Wright acted as project supervisor, approving the house plans of Usonia II's other architects. These twelve other architects constituted the Design Panel,¹³ who were to be commissioned by Usonia II members for house plans. Members also had the option to request an architect outside of the Design Panel, but his designs would also have to be approved by Wright before construction began.

In his contract with Usonia Homes, Inc., Wright also agreed to design the site plan, community buildings, and whatever houses he desired, all for a fee of

ten percent of the total construction cost. Wright's site plan (fig. 3.3) included fifty-five circular lots, each containing one acre.¹⁴ These lots were clustered in groups of six, which in turn enclosed an area of land to be used as a park, the left-over wedges to be used freely by all of the co-operative members.

In Pleasantville's site plan, there is more regularity in the placement of the circles than either of the Galesburg or Parkwyn Village projects (figs. 2.2 & 2.3). These three communities show the evolution of Wright's work with circular plots. In the case of Parkwyn Village the lots are grouped along streets, and the houses' locations are fixed in relation to the road's path. At Galesburg, however, the road is secondary to the lots' locations, weaving in and out of the circles. Pleasantville is the maturation of these previous plans, with its nine rows of circles (the open spaces would also accommodate a circle) inscribed first and the streets making their way through the development (fig. 3.4).

Wright's experimentation with circles in rows can be sensed by comparing the Great Workroom (fig. 3.5) and the Consumer Products Sales Dome (fig. 3.6) in the Johnson Wax Administration Building in Racine, Wisconsin. In the first space, the circles are grouped on a grid (fig 3.7) with each circle inscribed into one of the grid's squares, and large gaps were left over. When every other row of circles is shifted slightly (fig 3.8), so that by connecting each circle's origin a triangular pattern results the open spaces left behind are triangular wedges, smaller than the first gaps' shape. So while the owner's plot is kept constant, the left-over areas are minimized by simply shifting alternate rows of circles; this is the scheme Wright employed in Pleasantville's site plan.

As in the Pittsfield, Massachusetts pre-war project, Wright stresses privacy and territoriality in Pleasantville's design. By placing the houses in adjoining clusters of six with no two facades meeting, Wright prevented unwanted intrusions on the household. The plan for Usonia II perpetuates this idea of identity through land ownership. Since each house sits at the center of a circular one acre lot, it is clear to the owners where property lines fall. This identity of place and personalization of dwellings is reinforced with each family choosing its own architect.

Wright's original site plan went through two different alterations, the first by the Design Panel who changed it, "to better accommodate roads and maximize the space in each of the lots."¹⁵ The Design Panel's plan separated the plots, so that the circles were no longer tangential, and Bayberry Drive made a loop, connecting it to Usonia Road, and not Nannyhagen Road. The final change to the site plan came when the Town of Mt. Pleasant refused to approve it until the circles were changed into geometric lots, a refinement which was made by Henken. Consciously or unconsciously, Henken applied the theory of Löschian Equilibrium. This economic theory states that the ideal shape for a market is the circle, "But because circles leave empty corners, the demand per unit of the entire area in the case of the hexagon exceeds not only that of a square and a triangle, but even that of a circle. In other words, among all the possibilities of realizing the same total demand, the most land is required with a triangle, and the least with a regular hexagon."¹⁶ By reshaping Wright's circular plots into regular polygonal lots, Henken used the same rationale as Lösch, in creating hexagonal

sites that abutted each other like a honeycomb (fig. 3.9).

Wright's plan for Usonia II also included a community center, farm unit and school building, but none of these features of his plan was ever realized. In the community center's in-line floorplan (fig 3.10), the second floor lounge and kitchen open out onto a terrace and a recreation area. The function of the center in Broadacre City was discussed by Wright in *The Disappearing City*, and with the exception of the art gallery, Pleasantville's community center would serve a similar role:

The community center would be an educational factor as well as an amusement center. The art gallery, the museum would be there. And as all would be laid out in harmony with each other and the ground, each center would take on the individuality of its circumstances. Scattered over the states these centers would embody and express the best thought of which our democratic ideal is capable. There would be no commercial bustle or humdrum here. All common excitement would be reached, further on, at the service stations. But the various community centers should be quiet places for study, reflection and introspection, in comradeship.¹⁷

The community center (fig. 3.11) was to be located in the northern portion of the development, next to several guest cottages. There is a school included in the *House and Garden* 1951 map,¹⁸ but that too was unbuilt and the children attend Bear Ridge School, located on another section of the former Mastick Estate. This map also shows a pond that became known as the 'Mud Hole' in the section of new buildings. Another swimming area was created at the other end of the community, in what is called the South Field (fig. 3.12). This area was originally

meant for a farm unit (fig. 3.13) that was to be accessed from Nannyhagen Road. Wright's tendency to include farms in his planned communities is discussed in Chapter Two. Usonia II's farm was to be "a demonstration farm, where ex-New York children can find out what it is like to milk a cow."¹⁹

Usonia II's facilities were to be used and paid for by all its members, in keeping with the principles of the Rochdale pioneers and the procedures of straight co-operative building ownership. The financial history of the Pleasantville group is clearly outlined in Priscilla Henken's article entitled "A 'Broad-Acre' Project," of 1954. To join the co-operative there was an initial fee of \$100, plus a \$5 fee for each member of the new family. Each month the members paid \$50 which was deposited into a joint account, but credited individually to the members. It was this collection of money that initially allowed Usonia's founders to buy the Pleasantville property. The land cost \$20,000 and by the time of sale, the members had pooled twice that sum or \$1,200 per member family.²⁰

By 1948 Usonia Homes, Inc. had collected \$120,000 and was ready to build. At first they built 5 houses (figs. 3.14 & 3.15), then 2 more, and then 8 were approved if the owners could get all the financing on their own. Lending institutions were unwilling to commit to financial backing because:

The cooperative principle of nonracial or religious discrimination threatened a lowering of real estate values in certain communities; modern houses had no resale value as compared to conventional houses; and should the group dissolve, as was more than likely, there would be gargantuan disputes about the jointly

owned water supply system, roads, and community lands.²¹

Finally in 1950, the Knickerbocker Federal Savings and Loan saw that Usonia II was indeed a sound project and agreed to a group mortgage. The bank's president commented:

Here we have houses designed by Mr. Wright himself, and as usual, twenty to thirty years ahead of their time, At the tag end of these loans we will be secured by marketable, contemporary homes instead of dated stereotypes, obsolete before they are started. We are banking on the future, not the past.... Here we have a group that is setting a new pace both in co-operative ownership and architectural design. We like it because we think group developments offer both the lender and the owner the maximum of protection against the greatest single factor in realty depreciation - that of neighborhood depreciation.²²

The bank's agreement was to draw up individual mortgages for each plot, and then the owner would have a ninety-nine year lease that could be renewed later by the owners' heirs. While leasing the property the owner would make monthly mortgage payments, as well as community and maintenance fees. This type of lease was common "During the Twenties, [when] most owners were tied to their building with 99-year, no escape-clause leases. The only out was to sell...Today, most co-ops are set up with relatively short-term leases and frequent escape clause renewals. If a tenant defaults on his payments and cannot find a buyer, he turns his stock over to the tenant organization. He loses his investment, but not his shirt."²³ If a Usonian wanted to leave the community, he would sell his house to the co-operative, who would then sell the house to a

new member as required in the Usonia rules.

Usonia II had a covenant, "Declaration of Restrictions Upon Land of Usonia Homes - A Cooperative, Inc.", drawn up in 1950.²⁴ This covenant was part of all the members' deeds, and included such guidelines as : common ownership of all the lands and facilities, building only year-round residences, without fences (built or living), and no livestock. Usonia II's covenant differs from those created earlier in the century, when homeowners' agreement were developed to ensure the community's homogeneity. "The middle-class suburb of the 1920's had covenants with regulations governing their style of architecture, the size of houses, policy toward cars, proximity of business and commerce, and restriction of entry to ethnic and religious minorities."²⁵ Usonia II's commitment to diversity is seen in its architecture and people. Architectural variety was achieved because of the different members of the Design Panel, the sites themselves, and the needs of the specific clients. So "...even though standards of sizes, materials, and modules were established, and there are many features in common, each house is the only one of its kind, a work of art with the artist's signature."²⁶

The founding members of Usonia II were from similar backgrounds, first time home buyers with young families who were looking for a community outside of New York City, and willing to try anything once. As the late Aaron Resnick, a founder and Design Panel member, said, "I think there was a great surge of idealism after the war, which gave us a freedom to do what we wanted to do. We were united on several concepts. We wanted natural or organic

houses, we wanted a sense of community spirit and we needed homes that could be built inexpensively. And, of course, we were all admirers of architect Frank Lloyd Wright.²⁷

To ensure that the members of Usonia II were diverse, there was an interview process for prospective residents. In a recent interview with an original member of the co-operative, Mrs. Schimmel, she said the community was looking for, "...one poet, one physician, one ditch digger...."²⁸ Priscilla Henken's article describes the variety of the group more clearly:

They represent a cross-section of religious and political affiliation, and varied occupations; teachers, dentists, a lawyer, a doctor, engineers, architects, advertising executives, salesmen, business owners, chemists, journalists, decorators, and of course, housewives. The ages vary from the middle twenties to the early sixties. The common denominator is the willingness to live cooperatively, and a feeling for modern architecture.²⁹

One founder, Roland Reisley, likened the original members and the first days of Usonia with the struggle of the title character in Eric Hodgins' book *Mr. Blandings Builds His Dream House* (1946).³⁰ Mr. Blandings responded to an advertisement in the New York Times for a "farm dwelling, oak grove, apple orchard, trout stream, hayfields, four barns, seclusion, superb view, original beams, paved highway, acreage, will sacrifice."³¹ This sacrifice was not to be without a fight, and Mr Blandings was soon at odds with his real estate agent, the former owner, a demolition crew, the local historical society, and plumbers. Ultimately, his family's dream house was featured in *Home Lovely* magazine,

seen by readers all across the nation. While "miles away on Bald Mountain, in the midst of Surrogate Acres, beneath an uninsulated roof which creaked slightly now and then under the growing snow load of a winter storm, Mr. Blandings smiled uneasily in his sleep. He was dreaming that his house was on fire."³²

The members of Usonia II also fit the profile of the thirty-five original owners of Wright homes in Eugene Streich's "An Original Owner Survey of Frank Lloyd Wright's Residential Architecture" (1972). He concluded that this small group was in the "upper middle socio-economical level, educated, [with a] streak of independence,... vowed never to do this again, moved in and spent the next one or two years discovering unexpected delights,...[and] eventually became resigned to dealing with a seemingly unending stream of visitors."³³ Usonia II residents commented on the visitors to their neighborhood in a survey I conducted of the community.³⁴ When asked about the reactions of outsiders, there was a variety of answers: likened it to Eden or Nirvana; thought the residents were radicals, nudists, communists, or 'a nest of weirdos if not just plain anarchists.'³⁵

Visitors come to the Pleasantville development hoping to see the three houses designed by Frank Lloyd Wright. These houses were designed for Sol Friedman, Edward Serlin, and Roland Reisley. William Storrer aptly described these works as, "three Wright designed homes were built close to each other in [a] densely wooded, hilly countryside within commuting distance north of New York City."³⁶ There were two additional Wright designs for Usonians,

homes for Irwin Auerbach and Sidney Miller, but these projects were never built.

The Sol Friedman House was designed in 1948 (fig. 3.16), and Wright described the plan after its completion three years later in an *Architectural Forum* article:

The house rises from a plan based upon two intersecting circles, one holding the main living area, the other on the first floor level holding the work center and guest room. On a second floor level come the bedrooms and a children's play area, opening into the two-story living room as a balcony section. ³⁷

In a 1948 letter from Wright to the Friedmans, Wright explains the floorplan, "The L.R. is large because it is Porch, L.R., D.R., etc., in one space. Nothing particularly expensive about it.³⁸ The estimated cost of the house was \$30,000, but it eventually climbed to \$67,500 after two years of construction. Originally meant to be of poured concrete, the house had a smooth texture in the 1948 drawing. When built it was made instead from field stone and stone from Pleasantville's Lake Street Quarry,³⁹ which gives it a more rusticated appearance (fig. 3.17). This quality has prompted comments such as, "'Round House of the East' - with its castlelike turrets of local fieldstone - sits perched on a hill, and nearby stand 47 other modern homes."⁴⁰

In a Wright elevation (fig. 3.18) the casement windows are rectangular and form a straight band across the facade of the house. In the executed design the windows effected that band, but half circles were added at the base of the window, creating a shape like an upside down Palladian window, which was outlined in

Cherokee red. The height of the windows and the built-in furniture afford the visitor an upward view into the trees, instead of down to the street level (fig. 3.19).⁴¹

The car port or car shelter, as Wright calls it in this 1948 letter, is located roughly thirty feet from the house (fig. 3.20). "I like the car to one side rather than part of the house. I hope you agree," Wright wrote.⁴² The carport is similar to the repeated form (fig. 3.21) found in the main office space of the Johnson Wax Building (1936) in Racine, Wisconsin. This mushroom-like carport is connected to the house by a masonry wall that wraps around the house and then moves straight along the yard, and terminates by again wrapping around the carport.

The circular patterns created by the house and carport are seen in the interior of the Friedman House with its open plan in which each room leads into the next as they make their way around the masonry core. The central hearth is a prominent feature in this house. In Edgar Kaufmann, jr.'s essay, "Precedent and Progress in the Work of Frank Lloyd Wright," (1941) he explains the lineage of the inglenook and hearth as they passed from England's W. Eden Nesfield and Richard Norman Shaw to America's Henry Hobson Richardson, then to Louis Sullivan and finally to Wright.⁴³

Now Wright intuitively was pushing ahead..., approaching the insight that was to guise his designing for the next half-century: the realization that the essence of architectural expression was control of space, and that mastery over materials and technologies was ancillary to the mastery of space, that is, the ability to characterize spatially the nuances and relationships of

human needs and aspirations. Not surprisingly, the inglenook suffered many alterations in the course of this evolution. Its mutation proceeded from the enclosed core, to the half-open core, to the liberated core - an island that coordinates spaces around it; yet the core always included a hearth and some trace of an alcove.⁴⁴

Although the fireplace takes up little space in the floorplan it is an inviting niche that draws one into the heart of the house. The topography of the Friedman's site was ultimately to influence Wright's name for the house. In a 1950 letter from Wright to Friedman he stated, "The name for the house is now in order and should I think have the word 'toy' in it - say 'Toyland' - or what, I wonder. Do you have something ?"⁴⁵ Wright wrote "Friedman is a toy maker. Here is the toy-maker's 'happy house' crowning its little toy hill. The little Friedmans all over the world would love this house."⁴⁶ Actually Friedman was in the retail sale of records, but that did not stop Wright from naming the house Toyhill.

The second of Wright's Usonia II designs was the Edward Serlin House of 1949. Serlin was an executive at Radio City Music Hall and his house differs from Friedman's in that the plan is in-line instead of circular. The house is one story and was originally to have two projecting wings on the east and west sides, but these were not constructed, (fig. 3.22) and instead the plan is held within one rectangular footprint. Wright's drawings of the house have several notes on the construction process; he mentions that it is based on a five foot square module, the masonry walls are reinforced by wire fabric, and the floor is 3 1/2 inch concrete mat. As in the Friedman house, the concrete mat is red.⁴⁷ The walls

are a combination of stone, horizontal wood siding, and glass (fig. 3.23). A photograph was taken during the construction of the house, showing Wright and Henken, both giving directions (fig. 3.24). In 1970 an addition and greenhouse were designed by Usonia II member Aaron Resnick, and two years later a garage was added.

The third of Wright's executed designs in Pleasantville is the home of Roland Reisley and family of 1951. Thomas Doremus, author of *Frank Lloyd Wright and Le Corbusier : the Great Debate* (1985), describes the Reisley House as "a typical Prairie house. Here, two of Wingspread's [the Herbert Johnson House] four cloister wings, the master bedroom wing and the children's bedroom wing, are laid out at a sixty-degree angle to each other. Between the two are a hexagonal living room, defined with a sheltering pyramidal roof, and family dining/kitchen area."⁴⁸ Wright's plans for the house note that the module used is a 60 degree triangle, each side measuring nine feet. These plans also confirm that Wright called this development Usonia II (fig. 3.25). The equilateral triangle is seen throughout the house with indirect lighting which is housed above a triangular opening (fig 3.26).

Built of local fieldstone and wood, the Reisley House sits above Usonia Road (fig. 3.27), and appears to be a natural outcropping of the site. Each elevation has a band of windows that are beneath large overhangs (fig. 3.28). These windows channel the low winter sun into the house, while keeping the summer sun out. This passive heat design is seen in many of the other Usonia II residences. In the study, Wright designed the windows at the corners without

mullions (fig. 3.29). Of this feature, Wright wrote, "The corner window is indicative of an idea conceived, early in my work, that the box is a Fascist symbol, and the architecture of freedom and democracy needed something besides the box. So I started out to destroy the box as a building."⁴⁹ The Reisley House is certainly not a box, but rather a continuous living space. As in the Friedman House, this house has a large hearth, occupying one side of the hexagonal living room (fig. 3.30). Reisley wrote of his family's house, "Our home has been unbelievably satisfying. To feel uplifted by something beautiful - every day - for 40 years - Wow! It works very well and is easily maintained. Mr. Wright was very kind and responsive to us. He gave us a jewel."⁵⁰

Two additional houses that Wright designed but were never built are the Auerbach House and the Sidney Miller House. In 1948 Otilie Auerbach wrote Wright praising his work, and after mentioning a mutual friend, wrote:

Last August in a roundabout way I heard of Usonia at Mt. Pleasant and spent several weeks tracking down information. When at last my husband and I located the land and met some members and learned that you had agreed to design at least five of the homes, then it began to look as if my dream might come true.

We have become members of the Cooperative, have chosen site #44, and have notified the Design Panel that we are asking you to be our architect. So that you may know something about ourselves and our family set-up, I am attaching some notes. It would make us more than happy to hear from you and to know that we will have the rare privilege of living in a Frank Lloyd Wright house.⁵¹

The Auerbach House (fig. 3.31) was designed in 1951 and is based on a equilateral triangle. The plan bears a striking resemblance to the Roy Peterson House of 1942 in Madison, Wisconsin (fig. 3.32), with the exception of its materials: the Peterson House was wood siding while the Auerbach House was masonry. Both are drawn in plan to contain kitchen, dining room, work space, three bedrooms, carport, and loggia all within a triangular footprint (fig. 3.33). Inside the Auerbach House, the floor was to be red concrete,⁵² and there are two fireplaces, each occupying a vertex of the points of the triangular footprint.

Unfortunately, the Auerbach House remains in plan form only. In a 1950 letter from Ottilie and Irwin Auerbach to Wright,⁵³ the couple feared cost overruns and had to break their agreement in order to find a more affordable design. The design for Sidney and Barbara Miller's House was never realized for similar reasons. The Millers were concerned with the expense of a Wright house and in a 1948 letter asked if it was possible to have their original plans enlarged from 1,100 to 1,500 square feet at a cost of \$10 per square feet. The Millers went on to write that a 1,500 sq. ft. would only be suitable for the next four or five years. "We're optimistic enough about our future to feel we will have more money to spend and we will want to spend it in building for ourselves as beautiful and spacious a home as possible. We do not want, therefore, in building now a minimum house to build one that will have to be completely rebuilt."⁵⁴

Wright's plan had featured a hexagonal living room attached to a linear wing (fig. 3.34). The Millers ultimately did live in Usonia II, but in a house designed by Aaron Resnick. Resnick's 1953 plan and elevation (figs. 3.35 & 3.36) for this

project show his admiration for Wright in the way his drawing style emulates the senior architect's.

The Usonian houses in Pleasantville were built by the Chuckrow Construction Co., of Hartsdale, New York, and another contracting company which was organized by David Henken, called Henken Builds, Inc. (fig. 3.37). Efficiency was achieved by the orderly design of the homes' functions, the use of standardized parts⁵⁵ and buying quantities of materials for the entire co-operative. Typical of other Usonian houses, these featured gravity heating and board and batten walls.

Gravity heating was a technique introduced to Wright while in Japan, working on Tokyo's Imperial Hotel.⁵⁶ Wright commented on gravity heat: "floor heat - where the heat is in the floor beneath the slab in a broken stone bed and with a thick rug on the floor you have a reservoir of heat beneath you. So, you sit warm, you can open the windows and still be comfortable and the children play on a nice warm surface and if your feet are warm, you sit warm - you are warm."⁵⁷ The process of installing gravity heat begins when the appropriate site is chosen and cleared and dug to the depth of 2 feet. "The Usonian house has a simple concrete mat, as we call it, laid upon 5 or 6 inches of broken stone ballast with no foundations other than shallow trenches dug in, then filled with broken stone. The walls rise directly on this stone ballast of foundation belt."⁵⁸ The pipes for the heating are embedded in the thin concrete slab under the house (fig. 3.39). The house is then warmed by the heat that rises from the steam or hot water in the pipes. Several Usonia II residents commented on

the gravity heating system; 'After 30 years the radiant heating in the floor started leaking and was irreparable,' 'The radiant heating is a time bomb,' and 'If I were ever crazy enough to build another house, it would not have a flat roof and would not use steel pipe for radiant heating.'⁵⁹

The next step in building a Usonian house was to draw the planning grid into the freshly poured concrete. In Japanese architecture the *tatami*, or grid, was based on a 3 foot by 6 foot module. "...[Wright] combined the ancient device of modules with his nuclear theme to enhance the vocabulary of an architecture of clusters dominating territories."⁶⁰ As previously mentioned, the three Wright houses in Pleasantville each has a different module (fig. 3.39).

The second building technique common among Usonian houses is making walls by board and batten construction.

With the exception of minimal masonry load-bearing or wind-bracing points, the exterior walls were either glazed or of the famous Usonian sandwich panel. These board and batten walls, ...[have a] core of plywood...covered on each side by a damp-proof membrane, and the battens screwed to it on both sides...This composite wall was strong, gave insulation, and, Wright claimed, was 'vermin proof and practically fireproof.'⁶¹

The building process was influenced by the Usonia II collective desire to keep costs down, so the members did much of the early work themselves, and bought materials in large quantities (fig. 3.40). "Electricity was brought in from nearby and the cooperators dug a well and built their own storage tank and pump house. They also bought a Quonset hut to store materials and supplies and a

tractor and fire fighting equipment."⁶² The sense of community was enhanced with the members working together on each other's houses. As James Anderson wrote, "Cooperation at that time included actual attempts at 'hands on' building, probably often to the dismay of our general contractor, purchasing materials in bulk, using early investments by all members to get a few houses started, offering anonymous financial aid to members who needed it, and fending off creditors."⁶³ The co-operative continued to build houses until the late 1950's.

In 1953, while Usonia II was in the full swing of construction, Henken was part of another Wright project, this time in New York City. Wright's *Sixty Years of Architecture* exhibit was mounted that Fall and it included a Usonian House (figs. 3.41 & 3.42) and pavilion which were built by "the hands of Henken Builds."⁶⁴ In Herbert Muschamp's book *Man About Town: Frank Lloyd Wright in New York City* (1983), he notes that, "The Usonian House (1953) was the first Wright building actually erected in New York City, and ironically, it was the last private residence to be built on Fifth Avenue. It was also the shortest lived. As the centerpiece of a traveling exhibition of Wright's work, "Sixty Years of Living Architecture," the Usonian House stood for less than a year on the future site of the Guggenheim Museum."⁶⁵ Henken's participation in this project and his attempts at self promotion and requests for additional pay, provoked Wright to write, "David: For supreme gaul [sic] and rhinoceros hide you win. You sold yourself to me (for a second trial) to build the Museum Pavilion, under similar false-pretences that I fell for in Usonia Homes : you had neither qualifications nor equipment as you represented them."⁶⁶ Like Wright, some of the members

found fault with Henken, his lack of experience, and the co-operative's organization. Cost overruns and financial woes, lessened the Usonians belief in the co-operative nature of the community.

Members refused to pay bills on houses, some were overcharged for services, and many wound up overcontributing [sic] to the cooperative...With the onslaught, of financial problems...members began to press for private ownership of their sites. The community divided bitterly. Some contended that if a family had financial troubles and couldn't meet their obligations, the whole cooperative would go under. Others, like the Henkens and the Resnicks, felt that a true cooperative would carry these families until they could meet their payments.⁶⁷

In 1955, the members in favor of private ownership of the land and houses won over those advocating the Rochdale principles, and the original covenant was canceled and replaced. There financial disputes continued until, "Finally, there were suits and countersuits over who owed what money to whom, and lawyers finally settled the problems by agreeing that the Henkens would be divorced from the Usonia community."⁶⁸ Although Usonia II was rocked by the 'Crisis of '54', a strong sense of community still existed. In some cases, residents refused work transfers, because they could not bear leaving their neighbors or Usonia. One couple, after moving, realized they wanted to return to the community but there were no houses for sale. The idea of building on another site was passed, since the members contiguous to the proposed lot all agreed that under the circumstances a house could be added.

Once Usonia II's forty-eight houses were completed, little change occurred to the built environment. There was a proposal for the beloved 'mud hole' to be developed into the Orchard Brook Club in 1973 (fig. 3.43), but the scheme was never realized. Today, Usonia is currently undergoing a transition in ownership. As the years go by, original owners are dying or choosing to live in smaller houses and the homes are up for sale. From my survey, the median age of the adult members who returned my survey was 64.8. To date there have been only thirteen of the houses sold, and six of those were to second generation Usonians. But the question looms, what does the future hold for this forty year old community ?

CONCLUSION

Today there are two direct threats to Usonia II, one from within, the other from without. The first is the weakened sense of community, due to new members who do not understand or are not aware of the neighborhood's unique co-operative background. Unlike the founding families, the incoming residents are one step removed from the planning/building years of the neighborhood and "the basic co-operative community concept is diluted by some new members who tend to regard Usonia as a nice financial deal - notable homes and sites with prestige. Unfortunately these members expect 'services' to be handed to them much as 'services' are in apartment houses. The idea of everyone's responsibility for Usonia is markedly absent."¹ The potential buyers attracted today may have the same communal spirit as the original members, but unlike the first owners, they have the ability to purchase a house for close to \$500,000 (fig. 3.45). The new members of the community must be reminded of the Pleasantville project's history, and told that this is not a collection of weekend homes.

Usonia II represents a 1950's suburb that had an alternative lineage from its contemporaries. The majority of suburbs at that time drew their design from American suburbs of 1920's, including Forest Hills Gardens, Sunnyside Gardens, and Radburn. These communities used Ebenezer Howard's notion of the Garden City, choosing to emphasize the combination of green spaces and residences. The concept behind Usonia II came from Frank Lloyd Wright's 1934 scheme for

Broadacre City. The Pleasantville development was the brain child of David Henken, an engineer from New York City, who with the original residents, and Wright, created this forty-eight house community based on Wright's principles of organic architecture. There is a definite need for Usonia II to be documented, since it is only mentioned briefly in secondary sources on Wright, a few magazine articles, and one exhibit catalog. The purpose of this paper is not only to make new members of Usonia II aware of its noteworthy past, but also the general public.

The second threat to Usonia II comes from the neighboring development, Heritage Hills, which is on land formerly part of the Seabury Mastick Estate. This collection of large Colonial houses can be seen from Usonia Road since the developers cleared the entire site before construction began in 1987 (fig. 3.46). The members of Usonia called an emergency meeting in order to discuss this growing threat to their community. The solution was to plant trees as a screen to hide the new development from the co-operative's view. The sense of invasion that was felt by the Usonians is doubly ironic when one remembers that the community was based on tolerance and respect for individual differences and yet the response towards the adjacent development was negative. There is the additional irony that the original 'all for one and one for all' spirit of the founders was dismissed and the residents' whose property abutted Heritage Hills were required to assume the total cost of the new trees.

Despite the changes in residents and the surrounding area, Usonia II has remained as it was designed. This is due to the community's strict covenant which has prevented major alterations to the houses and landscape. This regulation

however will expire in 1999, and there is a question as to whether it will be renewed. If it is not renewed, an alternative would be to have individual houses or the entire neighborhood designated as landmarks or district. Roland Reisley expressed his concern for the community's future when he wrote: "Usonia should be Landmarked, Historic Registered, Preserved. But many owners/buyers feel threatened by that."² Reisley's comment about landmarking was singular among the residents' survey responses, but it is an issue that the community will have to address in ten years when the area meets the National Register of Historic Places' requirement that a nominated site be fifty years old.

Registration of Usonia II as an historic district would only pertain to the physical structures and open spaces, while the important social organization on which the community was based would be overlooked. This is not to say that the maintenance of social formations is the role of the Register, but it questions the validity of preservation. Historic preservation is suited for the physical environment and in planned communities, co-operatives, and utopias the underlying importance of a social network remains untouched by landmark status. Remembering that the rigid structure of these types of social organizations lessens its longevity and leads to its inevitable demise, the fact that Usonia II has remained stable for forty years should make it clear that the community should plan its own future. In the same way that the communal versus private land ownership issue was solved, change management should be decided by those residents who have a respect for the community's past.

Hopefully, a mandate from a local preservation group to preserve the area will be unnecessary and the covenant, with its community oriented guidelines, will be renewed. This self governing mechanism was part of the original credos behind the development and should not be compromised. In the event that the covenant is not renewed, the nomination and possible museumization of Usonia II would be an unfortunate alternative for its future, since its foundation on shared goals, such as communal living and organic architecture would be forgotten vestigial elements. Whether Usonia is protected through the introduction of historic preservation or the residents' self preservation, this unique environment must be preserved so that others may learn to appreciate its strengths, as discussed by Priscilla Henken in 1954:

The idea of any single co-operative may start as the fruit of one man's thinking. To succeed, it must represent the thinking of many men. If Usonia prospers into the community we want, behind that success will be the vision and idealism of a few people in a generation of disillusion. It will represent the devoted and otherwise unrewarded work of directors and committee members; the inspiration of Frank Lloyd Wright and his Broadacre City; the ancestral Rochdale co-operatives; a financial plan born of our needs and our aims; and last, or perhaps first, among the membership at large, evidence of the democratic processes at work.³

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1 Usonia II is the development in Pleasantville, New York designed by Frank Lloyd Wright. Although, in his London Lectures of 1939, Wright labels his home (Taliesin) as Usonia I, a site in Lansing, Michigan as Usonia II, and a project in Wheeling, West Virginia as Usonia III, I have chosen to follow Wright's drawings of the houses in Pleasantville, that label the site Usonia II.

CHAPTER ONE

1 Arthur Gallion and Simon Eisner, The Urban Pattern : City Planning and Design, Fifth Edition. (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1986), p 95.

2 Wright, Gwendolyn. Building the Dream, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1981), p 97.

3 Kenneth T. Jackson, Crabgrass Frontier : The Suburbanization of the United States. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), p 75.

4 Ibid., p 80.

5 Ibid., p 136.

6 G. Wright, p 207.

7 Dennis P. Sobin, The Future of the American Suburbs: Survival or Extinction, (Port Washington, New York: National University Press, 1971), p 25.

8 Sobin, p 108.

9 Peter Hall, Cities of Tomorrow, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Basil Blackwell Inc., 1988), p 123.

10 John R. Stilgoe, Borderland: Origins of the American Suburb, 1820-1939, (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1988), p 226.

11 G. Wright, p 193.

12 Ibid., pp 74-5.

13 Ibid., pp 194.

14 Ibid., pp 205.

15 Gillion, p 188.

16 G. Wright, p 205.

17 Ibid., p 206.

18 Gillion, p 191.

19 G. Wright, p 205.

20 Ibid., p 240.

21 Ibid., p 241.

22 Jackson, pp 206-7.

23 Ibid., p 195.

24 Ibid., p 195.

25 The FHA was the same organization that appraised neighborhoods and then colored them one of four colors on their maps. Areas shaded in red were deemed 'hazardous,' or a place where mortgages were not guaranteed. The lowest ranking was at times racially discriminatory, and led to the term 'red lining.' See Kenneth Jackson's Crabgrass Frontier : The Suburbanization of the United States. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp 197-218.

26 For more on Wright's background and influences see Kaufmann, Edgar, jr., 9 Commentaries on Frank Lloyd Wright. (New York: Architectural History Foundation, 1989), specifically Kaufmann's essays "Frank Lloyd Wright's Momentoes of Childhood" Reprint. The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians," (October 1982) and "Frank Lloyd Wright's 'Lieber Meister," (1989).

27 From Frank Lloyd Wright's "Propositions of 1894," as quoted in: Frederick Gutheim, ed., Frank Lloyd Wright on Architecture, 1941, Reprint. (New York: Architectural Record Books, 1987), p 236.

28 Frank Lloyd Wright, The Disappearing City, (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co, 1932), p 12.

29 Frank Lloyd Wright, The Future of Architecture, New York: Horizon Press, 1953), p 192.

30 Ibid., p 192.

31 Wright had previously written, among his work was a series for the *Architectural Record* from May 1927 to December 1928.

32 Frank Lloyd Wright, An Autobiography, (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co, 1932), p 315.

33 Frank Lloyd Wright, The Living City, (New York: Horizon Press, 1958), p 74.

34 Bruce Brooks Pfeiffer, ed., Frank Lloyd Wright : His Living Voice. (Fresno, California: The Press at the California State University, 1987), p 344.

35 Frank Lloyd Wright, An Autobiography, (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co, 1932), p 43.

36 Patrick Meehan, ed. The Master Architect: Conversations with Frank Lloyd Wright. (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1984), p 120.

37 Pfeiffer, p 131.

38 Ibid., p 345.

39 There is conflicting information about the history behind the word Usonia. In Wright's autobiography of 1932, he notes "Usonia - Samuel Butler's appropriate name for the United States of America. Derived from the word "union." If the United States is "America," then Georgia is South America and New York in North America." See Frank Lloyd Wright, An Autobiography, (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co, 1932.), p 22. Wright states that he found the term in Butler's work Erewhon (1872), but after a reading I could not find the word mentioned in the book. In an interview with Roland Reisley he commented that many Wright researchers have attempted to find the true derivation of 'Usonia,' but have been unable to accurately trace the term's background. The word has been used outside the world of architecture, namely motor boating, with the Usonia 80 model. On page 20 of the May 1988 issue of *Motor Boating and Sailing*, the Usonia 80 is described as "This elegant, Italian-styled motor yacht, *Fiamma Blu* (or Blue Flame) has been compared to 'a nautical Lamborghini.'"

40 "Frank Lloyd Wright," *Architectural Forum* (January 1948), p 69.

41 George R. Collins, "Broadacre City: Wright's Utopia Reconsidered," paper read to the Four Great Masters of Modern Architecture Symposium, Columbia University, New York, 1961. As quoted in: John Sergeant, Frank Lloyd Wright's

Usonian Houses : The Case for Organic Architecture, (New York: Whitney Library of Design, 1976), p 16.

42 Frank Lloyd Wright, "The Architect and The Machine," (1927) published in: Frederick Gutheim, ed., Frank Lloyd Wright on Architecture, (New York: Duell, Sloane, and Pearce, 1941), p 132.

43 Frank Lloyd Wright, An Autobiography, Reprint, (New York: Horizon Press, 1977.), p 230. As one member of New York's Usonia II development, the late Walter Tamlyn, put it "Usonia ... never had anything to do with Utopia. Wright was a nut... [The] original founders looked to Wright as a 'high priest.'" Joan J. Cirillo, "Usonia : An Experiment in Living," Reporter Dispatch. (November 1976) : G4.

44 Sergeant, p 97.

45 "Frank Lloyd Wright," p 69.

46 Patrick Meehan, The Master Architect: Conversations with Frank Lloyd Wright. (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1984), p 23.

47 G. Wright, p 195.

48 Jackson, p 185.

49 Ibid., p 240.

50 Frank Lloyd Wright, The Future of Architecture, (New York: Horizon Press, 1953), p 280.

51 Frank Lloyd Wright, The Natural House. (New York: Horizon Press, 1954), p 97.

52 Patrick Meehan, Frank Lloyd Wright: A Research Guide to Archival Research, (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1983), p ix.

53 Sergeant, pp 40-71.

54 Frank Lloyd Wright, The Future of Architecture, p 283.

55 Ibid., p 279.

56 Meehan, The Master Architect: Conversations with Frank Lloyd Wright, pp 68-9.

57 Sergeant, p 78.

58 "Frank Lloyd Wright," *Architectural Forum* (January 1948.), p 79.

59 "Ardmore Housing Development Under Protest," Business Week. (13 July 1940) : 34.

60 Frank Lloyd Wright, The Future of Architecture, p 272.

61 Talbot Wegg, "FLLW Versus the USA," AIA Journal, vol 53. (February 1970), p 49.

62 Ibid., p 49.

63 "Frank Lloyd Wright," *Architectural Forum* (January 1948.), p 80.

64 Ibid., p 80.

65 "Frank Lloyd Wright," *Architectural Forum* (January 1948.), p 80.

66 Patrick Meehan, Frank Lloyd Wright: A Research Guide to Archival Research, p ix.

67 David Popenoe, The Suburban Environment: Sweden and the United States, (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1977), p 115.

CHAPTER TWO

1 Kenneth Jackson, Crabgrass Frontier : The Suburbanization of the United States. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), p 232.

2 Gwendolyn Wright, Building the Dream. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1981), p 242.

3 Jackson, p 232.

4 Ibid., p 232.

5 Ibid., p 232.

6 G. Wright, p 243.

7 Jackson, p 233.

8 Ibid., p 233.

9 Ibid., p 233.

10 Ibid., p 234.

11 Jackson, p 235.

12 Ibid., p 234.

13 Ibid., p 235.

14 Jackson, p 234.

15 David Popenoe, The Suburban Environment : Sweden and the United States, (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1977), p 113.

16 Jackson, p 237.

17 G. Wright, p 252.

18 Jackson, p 244.

19 "Frank Lloyd Wright," Architectural Forum, vol 88. (January 1948.), p 84.

20 Edgar Kaufmann, jr., "Wright: The Eleventh Decade," (1969) as published in Frederick Gutheim, ed., In the Cause of Architecture, Frank Lloyd Wright, (1941. Reprint. New York: Architectural Record Books, 1975), p 30.

21 Ibid., p 32.

22 Ibid., p 32.

23 "Postwar Co-op's," Architectural Forum, vol 88. (June 1948.), p 93.

24 "Co-operative Ownership to Meet the Present Shortage of Buildings," Architectural Forum, vol 32. (June 1920) : 240.

25 "Postwar Co-op's," p 93.

26 Patrick Rohan and Melvin Riskin, Cooperative Housing Law and Practice, (1967. Reprint. New York: Matthew Bender and Co, Inc., 1970.), p ii.

27 "Postwar Co-op's," p 93.

7 "Usonia Homes," Journal of Housing. (October 1953) : 319.

8 The Encyclopedia Americana International Edition, vol 7. (Danbury, Connecticut: Grolier Inc., 1986), p 747.

9 Rick Beard, ed., Realizations of Usonia : Frank Lloyd Wright in Westchester, (Yonkers, New York: The Hudson River Museum of Westchester, Inc., 1985), p 9.

10 According to a chain of title researched by Henken and others, the property was deeded to a Frederick Philipse by a royal grant from William and Mary. See Rick Beard, Realizations of Usonia : Frank Lloyd Wright in Westchester, p 8. At the turn of the century the property was part of the Seabury Mastick estate, as documented by E. Belcher Hyde's atlas, "Rural City District North of New York City," (1908), p 9.

11 Patrick Rohan and Melvin Riskin, Cooperative Housing Law and Practice, (1967. Reprint. New York: Matthew Bender and Co, Inc., 1970), p ii.

12 Wright's contract from Henken (December 23, 1945) is included in Appendix One.

13 For information on the Design Panel see Appendix Two.

14 In an article by David Henken, "Usonia Homes...A Summing Up," (1970), he noted that in Wright's original site plan the circular plots contained 0.85 acres. Also, Wright's plan of 1947, is said to include 55 plots of which 50 were to be developed, however I count 52 houses.

15 Beard, p 6.

16 August Lösch, "The Economics of Location," Southern Economic Journal, vol 5 (1938) : 112.

17 Frank Lloyd Wright, The Disappearing City, (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co, 1932), p 75.

18 Although the school was not built, Usonia II did have a summer camp and nursery run by mothers in the community.

19 "Usonia Homes : Every Family Has an Acre," Architectural Forum. (October 1948) : 16.

20 Beard, p 9.

21 Ibid., p 8.

22 Ibid., p 9.

23 "Postwar Co-op's," Architectural Forum, vol 88. (June 1948) : 93.

24 The Declaration of Usonia is included in Appendix Three.

25 Gwendolyn Wright, Building the Dream, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1981), p 157.

26 Beard, p 8.

27 "Usonia Community Recalls its Past," New York Times. (August, 30 1981) : 1.

28 Ester Schimmel. Interview with author. Pleasantville, New York. October 13, 1990.

29 Beard, p 8.

30 Roland Reisley. Interview with author. Pleasantville, New York. February 2, 1991.

31 Eric Hodgins, Mr. Blandings Builds His Dream House, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1946), p 17.

32 Ibid., p 237.

33 Eugene R. Streich, "An Original Owner Survey of Frank Lloyd Wright's Residential Architecture," Environmental Design : Research and Practice, U.C.L.A. EDRA 3/AR 8 Conference, January 1972.

34 My survey is in Appendix Four.

35 James Parker, a Usonia II resident since 1953, wrote, "Many people would drive through the Usonia private roads to stop and gawk and to make such comments as 'Won't stand up in a storm!' Architectural students often came and were welcome. When our son was about six years old a small group of sightseers came to peer by pressing noses to windows. He ran out and announced, 'My mother says you're very rude!' See Appendix Four.

36 William Allin Storrer, The Architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright : A Complete Catalog, (2d ed. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1979), p 316.

37 Frank Lloyd Wright, "House for Mr. and Mrs. Sol Friedman," Architectural Forum, vol 90. (January 1951) : p 99.

38 Letter from Wright to the Friedmans (August 31, 1948) is included in Appendix One.

39 In an interview with Michael Osheowitz (October 14, 1990), owner of the Sol Friedman House, he told that Wright announced that he was to visit the Lake Street Quarry in Pleasantville, and when he arrived the owner had on displayed what he thought was his finest stone, the most regular with straight edges. Wright was not pleased with these, and instead prowled around the business until he found the irregular and rugged stone he had envisioned for the Friedman House.

40 "Usonia Community Recalls its Past," New York Times. (30 August 1981) : 1.

41 Mr. Osheowitz mentioned a ironic story about living in a Wright house with built-in furniture. One night his wife was going down the spiral stairs and tripped, and when the paramedics came they asked one of the daughters to get a chair to carry her mother to the ambulance. The girl thought for a minute, "But, we don't have any chairs."

42 Letter from Wright to the Friedmans (August 31, 1948) is included in Appendix One.

43 Edgar Kaufmann, jr., "Precedent and Progress in the Work of Frank Lloyd Wright," as published in: Frederick Gutheim, ed., In the Cause of Architecture, Frank Lloyd Wright, (1941. Reprint. New York: Architectural Record Books, 1975), p 72.

44 *Ibid.*, pp 72-3.

45 Letter from Wright to the Friedmans (October 23, 1950) is included in Appendix One.

46 "House for Mr. and Mrs. Sol Friedman," p 99.

47 On Wright's plan for the Serlin House, he notes that the concrete was to colored with "Colorundum" red concrete floor color, which is manufactured by A. C. Horn Co., Long Island City, New York.

48 Thomas Doremus, Frank Lloyd Wright and Le Corbusier : The Great Debate, (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, Co, 1985), p 159.

49 Patrick Meehan, ed., The Master Architect: Conversations with Frank Lloyd Wright, (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1984), p 98.

50 This was in response to a survey. See Appendix Four.

51 Letter from Ottilie Auerbach to Wright (December 16, 1948) is included in Appendix One.

52 The blueprints for the Auerbach House show Wright's attention to detail with the plan for the hassocks to be used in the house; there were to be twelve made of plywood and airfoam. These plans also mention that the paint color was to be determined by the architect and that dark red 1/8th inch battleship linoleum was to be used.

53 Letter from Irwin and Ottilie Auerbach to Wright (August 4, 1950) is included in Appendix One.

54 Letter from Sidney and Barbara Miller to Wright (November 15, 1948) is included in Appendix One.

55 In November of 1948, the Design Panel created prints for standardized house parts, including casement windows, shelves, kitchen cabinets, doors, and door knobs. This blueprint is part of the collection in the Avery Archives.

56 Frank Lloyd Wright, The Natural House, (New York: Horizon Press, 1954), p 98.

57 Meehan, p 98.

58 "Frank Lloyd Wright," Architectural Forum (1948), p 69.

59 These comments were in response to a survey. See Appendix Four.

60 Edgar Kaufmann, jr., "Wright: The Eleventh Decade," (1969) as published in Frederick Gutheim, ed., In the Cause of Architecture, Frank Lloyd Wright, (1941. Reprint. New York: Architectural Record Books, 1975), p 31.

61 John Sergeant, Frank Lloyd Wright's Usonian Houses : The Case for Organic Architecture, (New York: Whitney Library of Design, 1976), p 19.

62 "Usonia Homes," Journal of Housing. (October 1953) : 344.

63 This was in response to a survey. See Appendix Four.

64 Frank Lloyd Wright, Sixty Years of Living Architecture, (New York: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1952), p 36.

65 Herbert Muschamp, Man About Town: Frank Lloyd Wright in New York City, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1983), p 88. The house for the "Sixty Years of Living Architecture," was kept in David Henken's garage until 1985. Henken had donated it to Channel 13 for an auction and it was bought by Tom Monaghan, owner of the Domino's Piazza chain and collector of Wright's works. Henken was asked to deliver and assemble the house in for Monaghan's museum in Ann Arbor, Michigan and it was during that trip that Henken died.

66 Letter from Wright to David Henken (February 15, 1954) is included in Appendix One. Although this may be just an example of Wright's temper, Henken's lack of design skill is illustrated by a comment by Mrs. Schimmel, who asked why a neighbor had light switches on the opposite wall from the entry way. The answer was that 'David wanted it that way'. For more on Wright's temper see Edgar Tafel's book Apprentice to Genius : Years with Frank Lloyd Wright. (New York: McGraw Hill, Inc., 1979), p 41-2.

67 Cirillo, p G3.

68 Ibid., p G3.

CONCLUSION

- 1 This was in response to a survey. See Appendix Four.
- 2 This was in response to a survey. See Appendix Four.
- 3 "Usonia Homes," Journal of Housing. (October 1953) : 45.

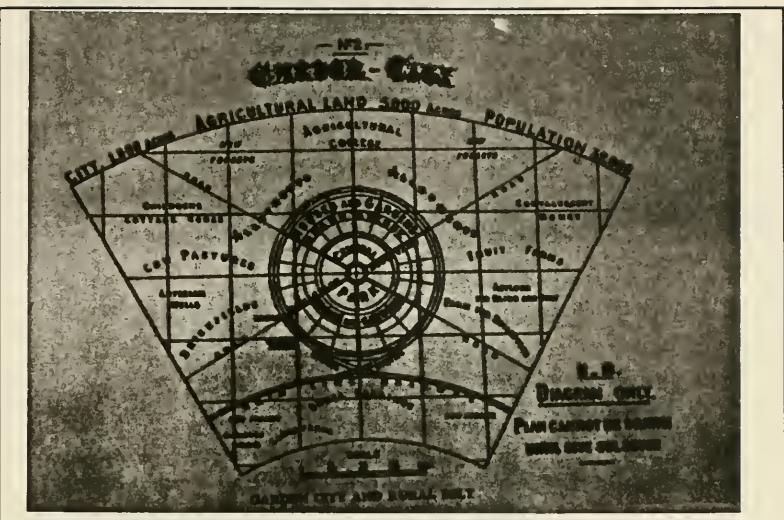


Fig. 1.1 Howard's model for the Garden City (1898)



Fig. 1.2 Plan for Forest Hills Gardens, New York City (1912)

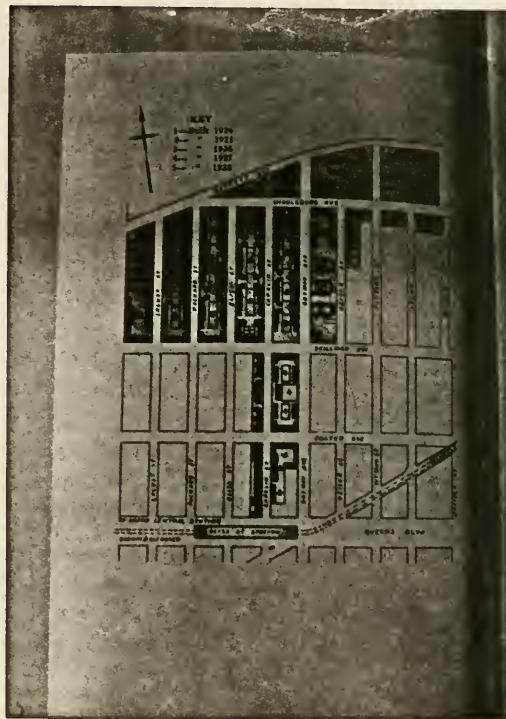
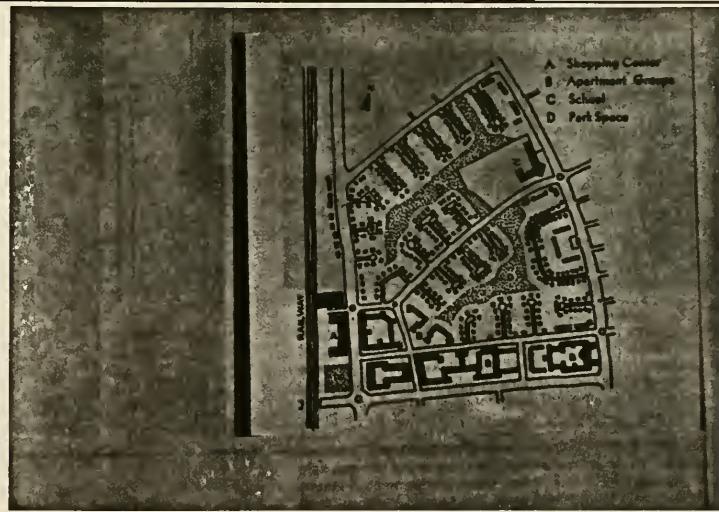


Fig. 1.3
Sunnyside Gardens,
New York City
(1924-28)

Fig. 1.4 Radburn,
New Jersey (1928)



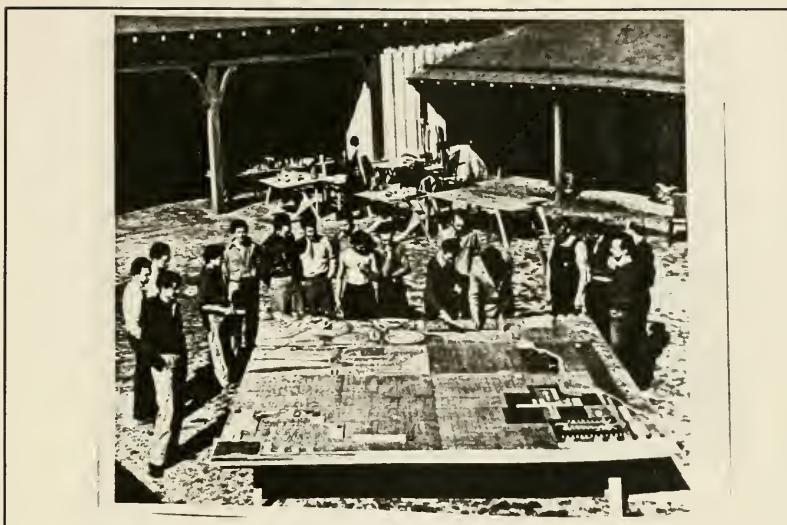


Fig. 1.5 Construction of Broadacre City Model (1934)

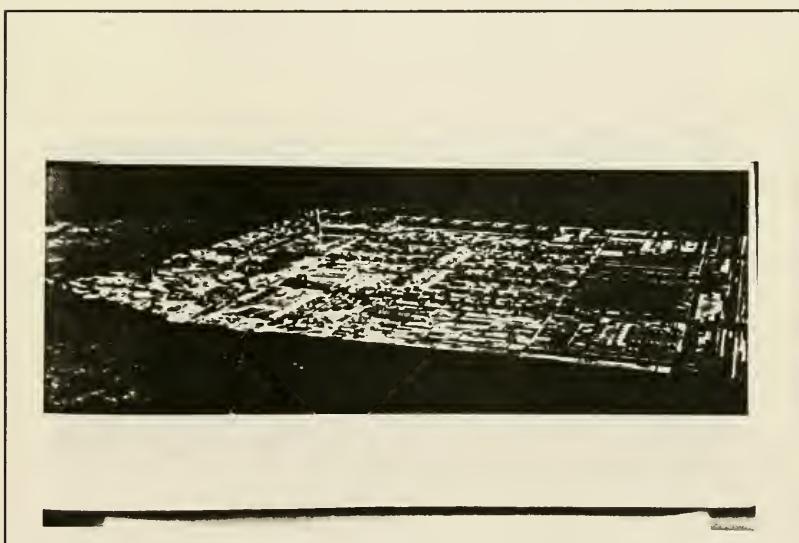


Fig. 1.6 Broadacre City Model

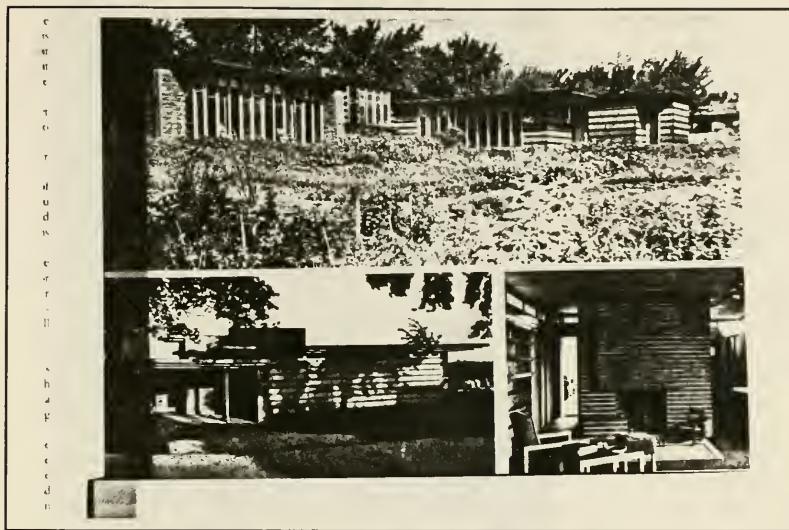


Fig. 1.7 Herbert Jacob House, Madison, Wisconsin (1937)

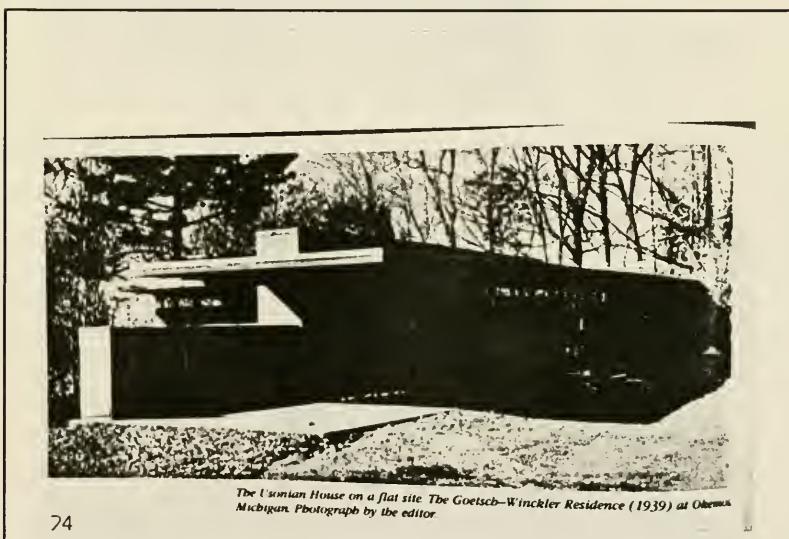


Fig. 1.8 Goetsch-Winkler House, Okemos, Michigan (1939)

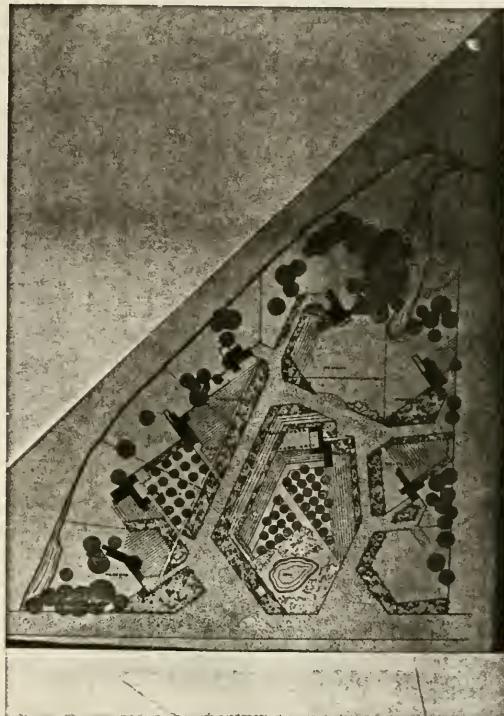


Fig. 1.9 Usonia I
Lansing, Michigan

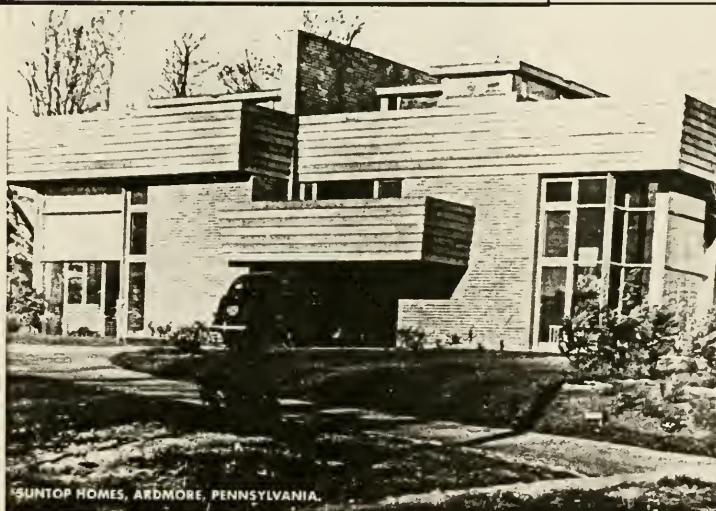


Fig. 1.10
Suntop Homes
Ardmore, PA
(1939)

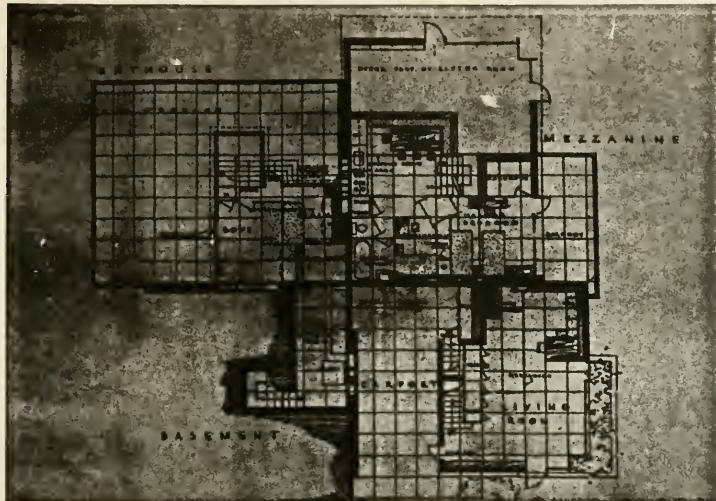


Fig. 1.11
Suntop Homes
floorplan (1939)

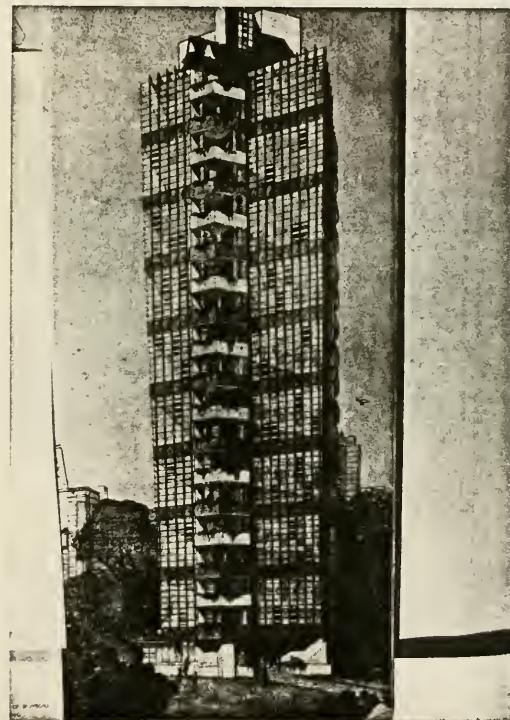


Fig. 1.12
St. Mark's Tower,
New York City,
project (1938)



Fig. 1.13 St. Mark's Tower, project, floorplan (1938)

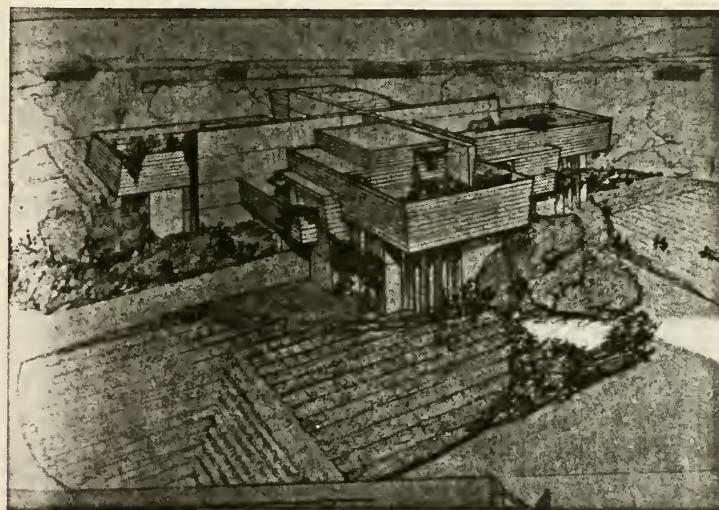


Fig. 1.14 Pittsfield, Massachusetts, project house (1941)

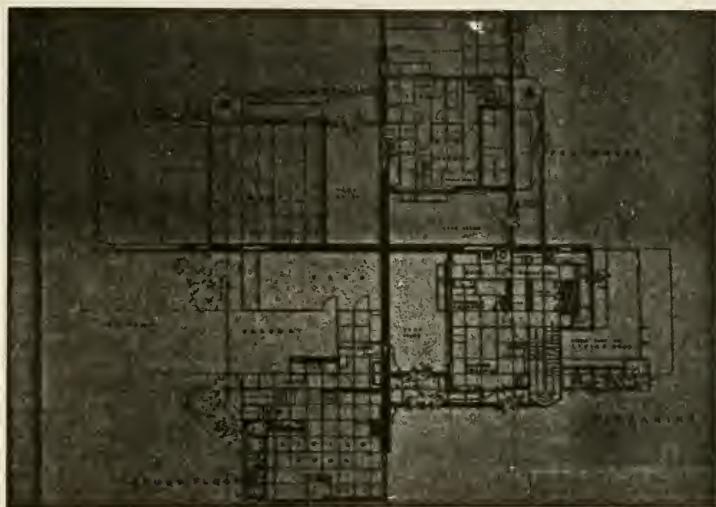


Fig. 1.15 Pittsfield, Massachusetts, project floorplan



Fig. Pittsfield, Massachusetts, project view

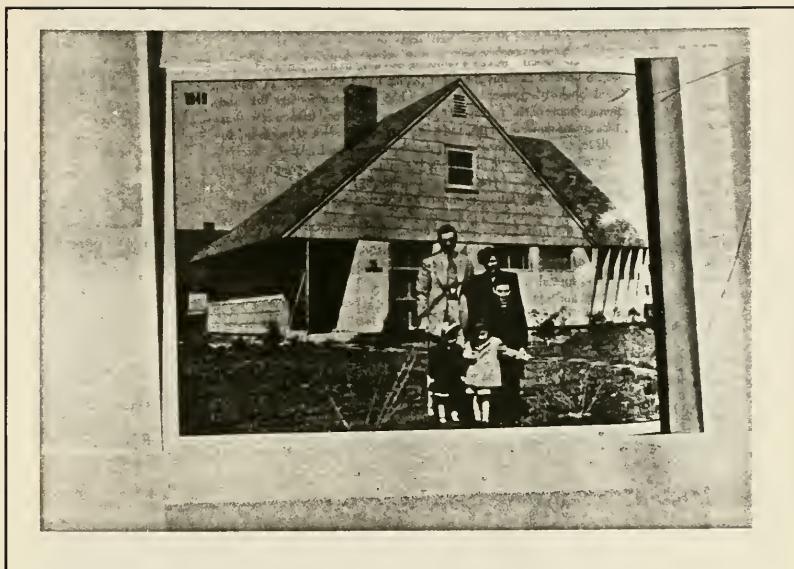


Fig. 2.1 Levittown Model House of 1949

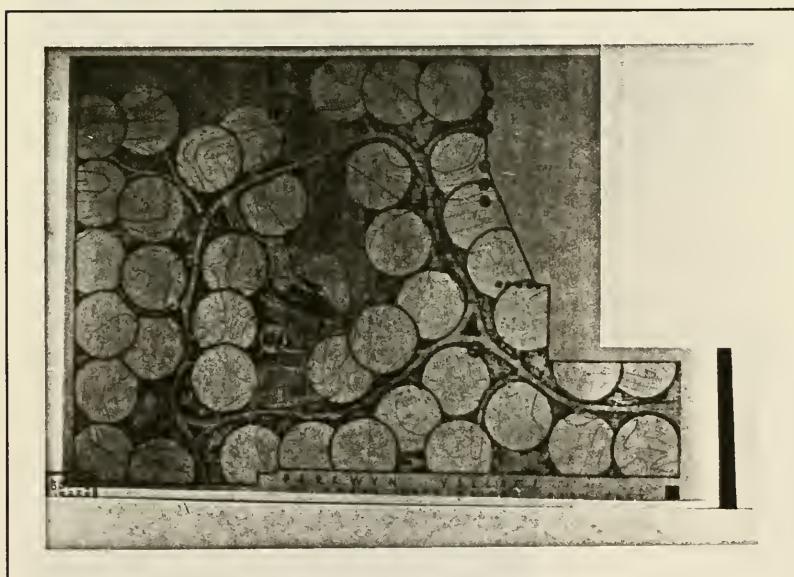


Fig. 2.2 Parkwyn Village, Kalamazoo, Michigan (1947)

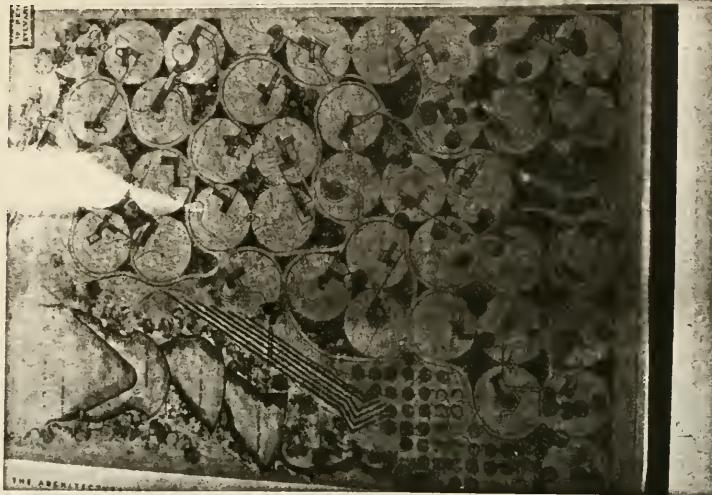


Fig. 2.3
Galesburg
Country Homes,
Kalamazoo,
Michigan (1947)

Fig. 3.1
Usonia II diagram
House and Garden
(1951)

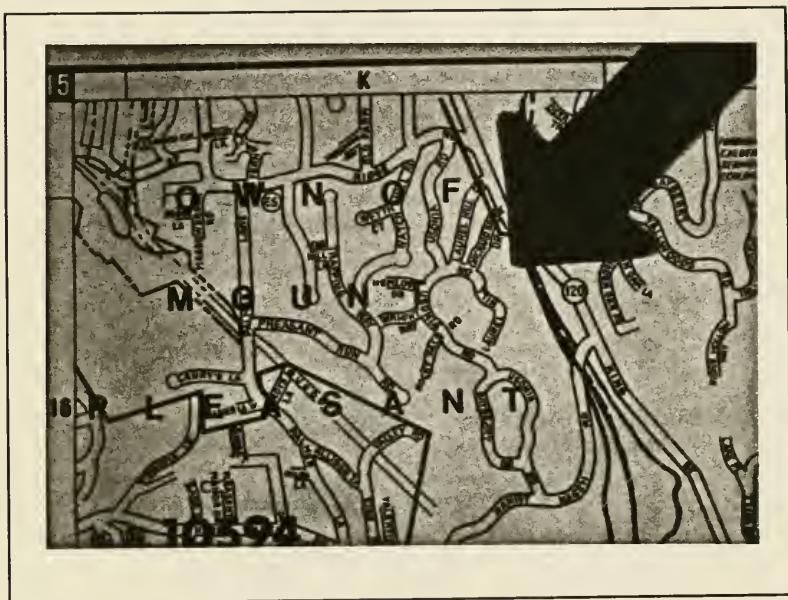


Fig. 3.2 1990 Map of Pleasantville, New York

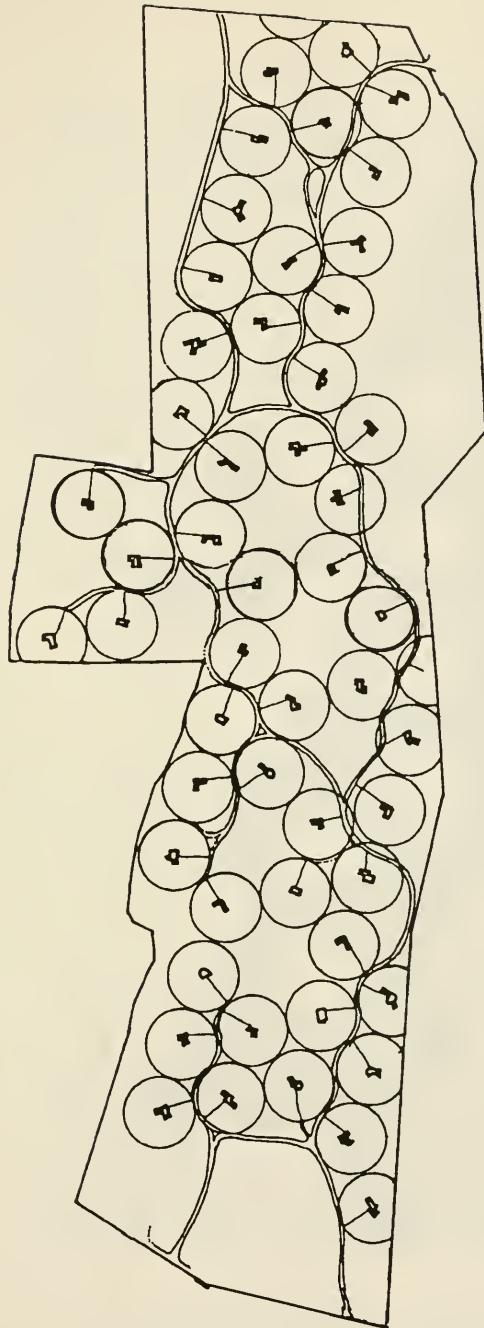


Fig. 3.3 Usonia II Site Plan (1947)

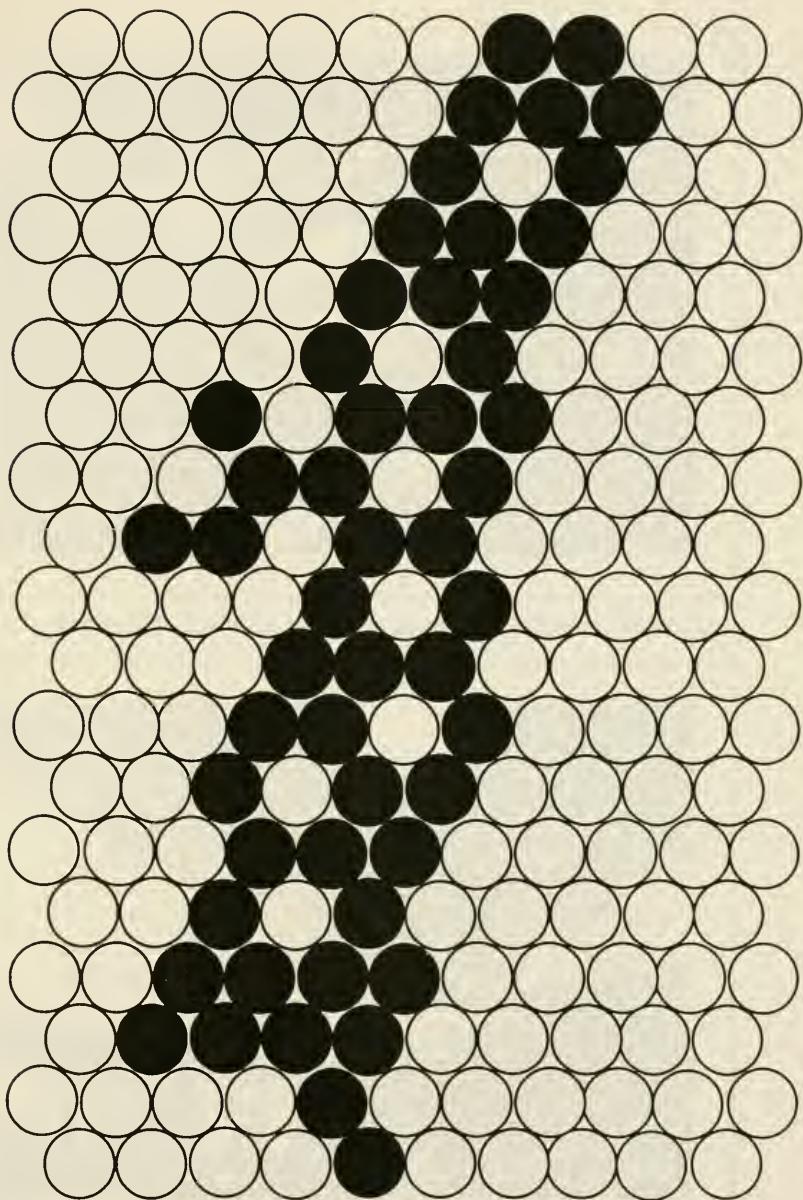


Fig. 3.4 Frank Lloyd Wright's Site Plan for Pleasantville, New York (1925)

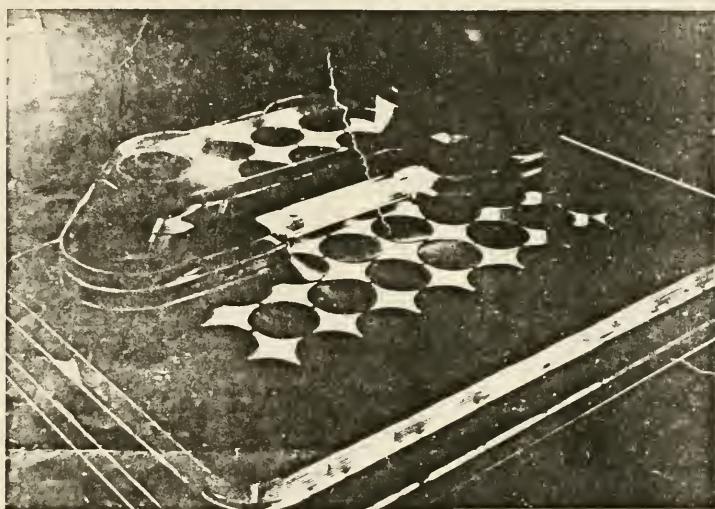


Fig. 3.5 Johnson Wax Building, Racine, Wisconsin, Night View of Model



Fig. 3.6 Johnson Wax Building, Consumer Sales Product Room (1937-39)

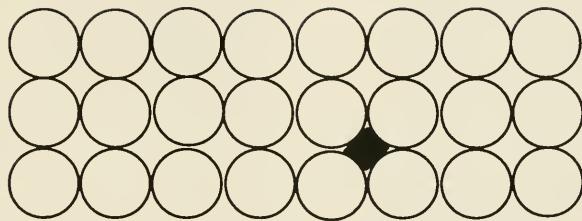


Fig. 3.7 Pattern of Circular Ceiling Elements in the Great Workroom of the Johnson Wax Building, Racine, Wisconsin (1937-39)

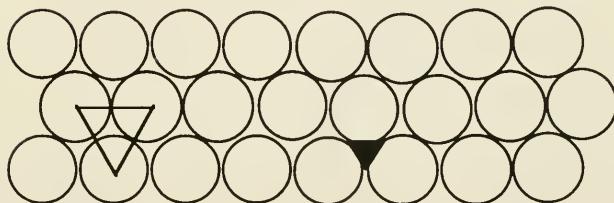


Fig. 3.7 Pattern of Circular Ceiling Elements found in the Consumer Products Sales Dome of the Johnson Wax Administration Building in Racine, Wisconsin (1937-39)

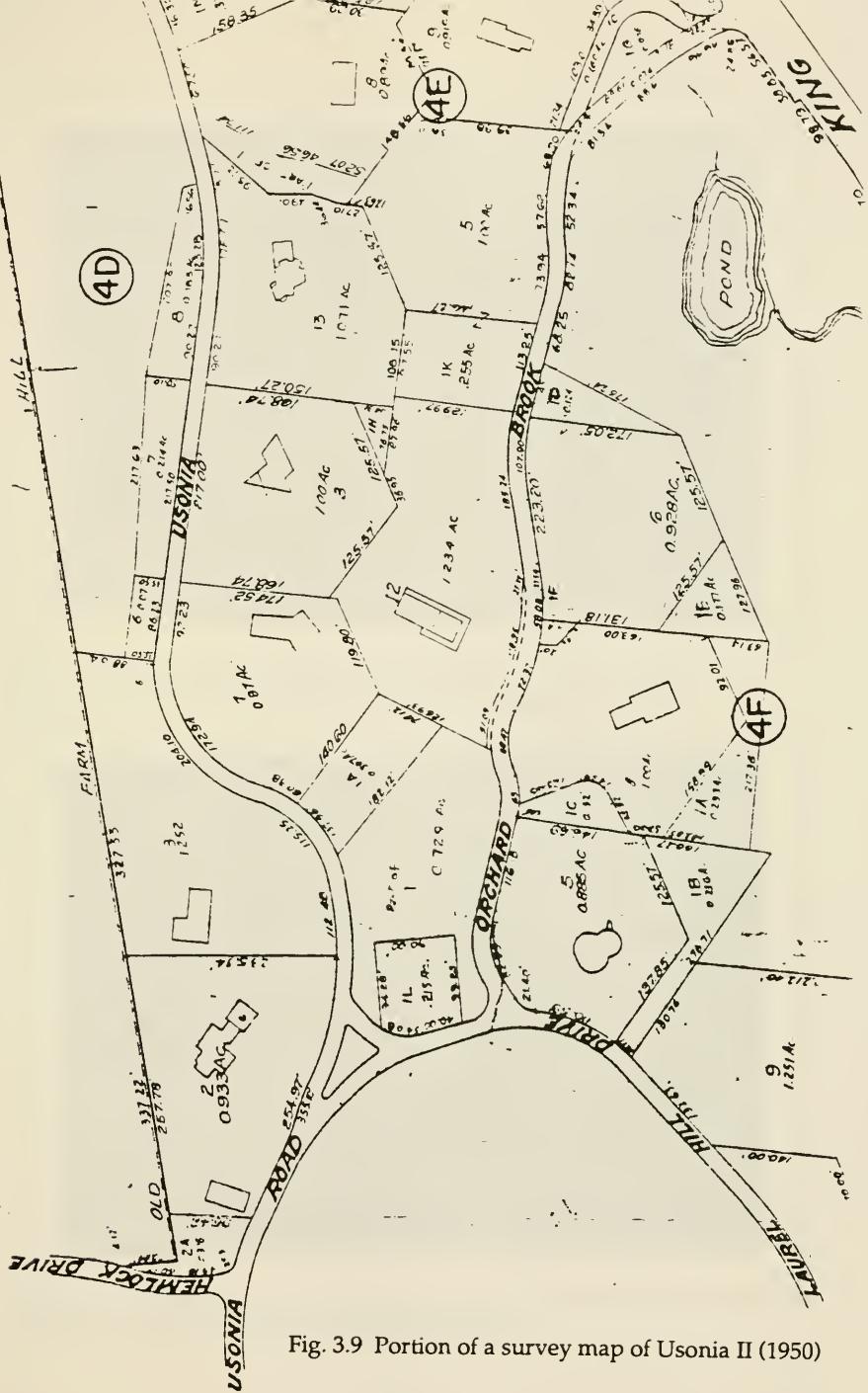


Fig. 3.9 Portion of a survey map of Usonia II (1950)

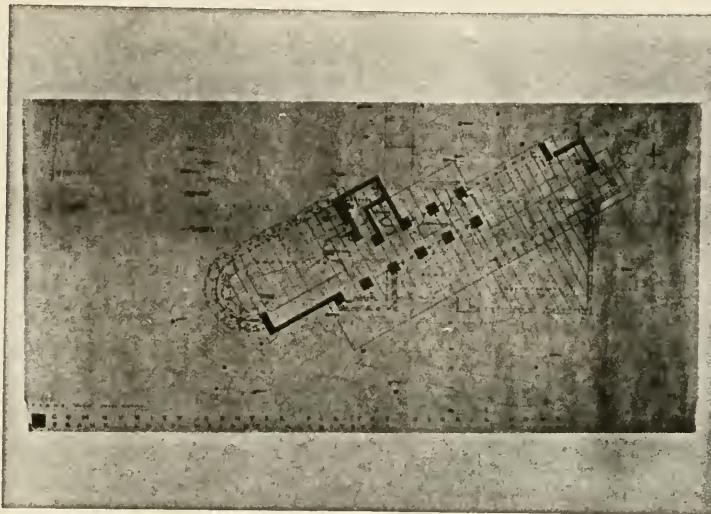


Fig. 3.10 Plan of Usonia II's Community Center, project (1948)

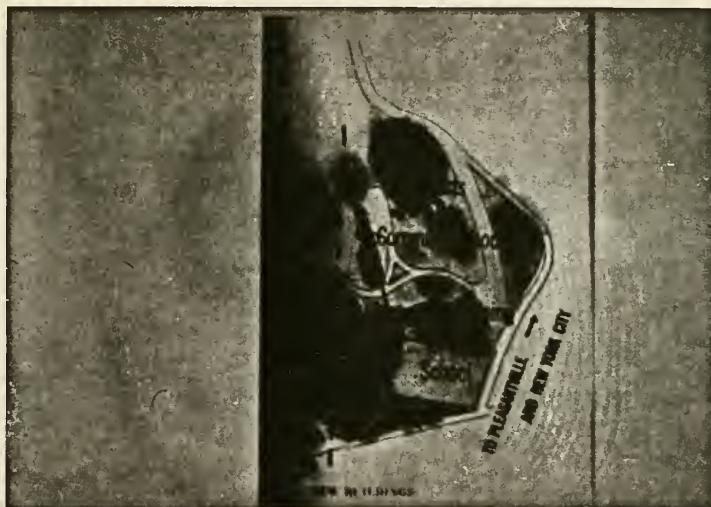


Fig. 3.11 A Plan of Usonia II's North End (1951)

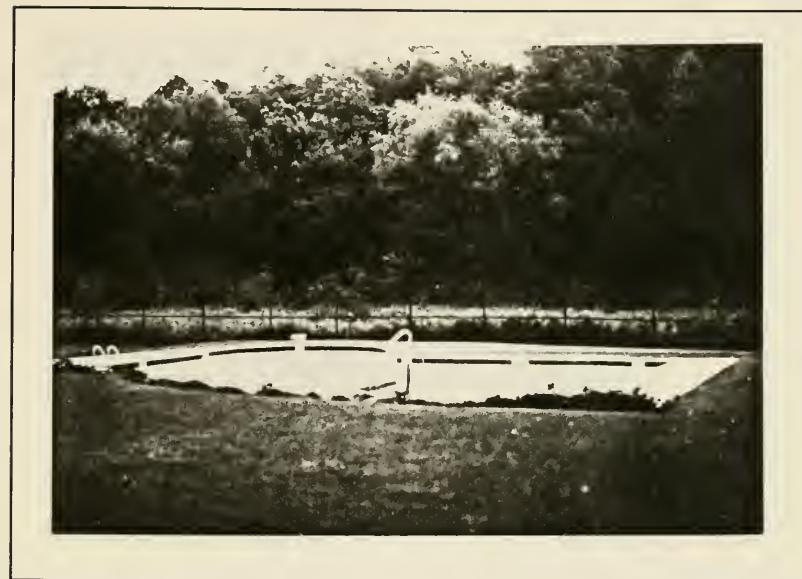


Fig. 3.12 The swimming pool in Usonia II

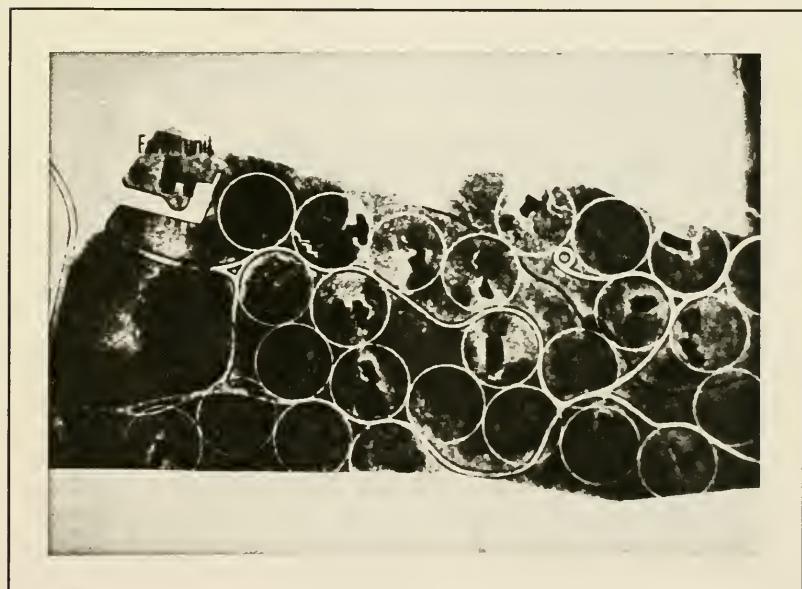


Fig. 3.13 Proposed farm unit for Usonia II (1951)



Fig. 3.14 Ground breaking of the first house in Usonia II (1948)



Fig. 3.15 Children at the site of the first house in Usonia II (1948)

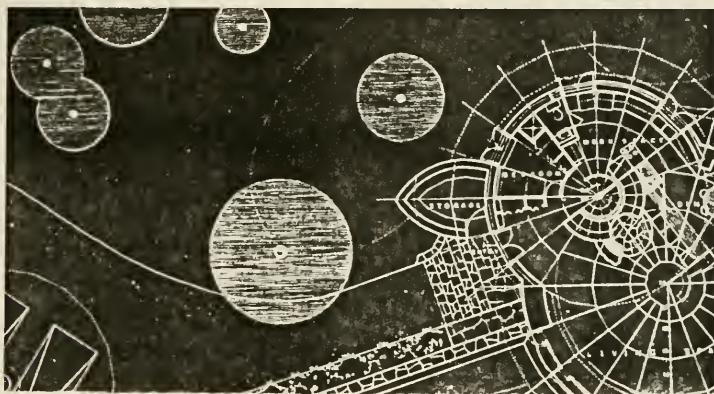


Fig. 3.16 Sol Friedman House, floorplan (1948)



Fig. 3.17 Sol Friedman House



Fig. 3.18 Sol Friedman House, elevation (1948)



Fig. 3.19 Sol Friedman House, interior



Fig. 3. 20 Sol Friedman House, carport

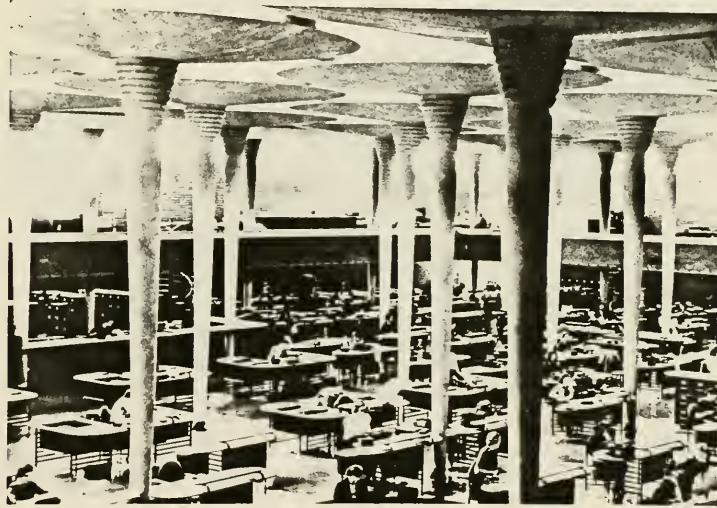


Fig. 3.21 The Great Workroom in the Johnson Wax Building

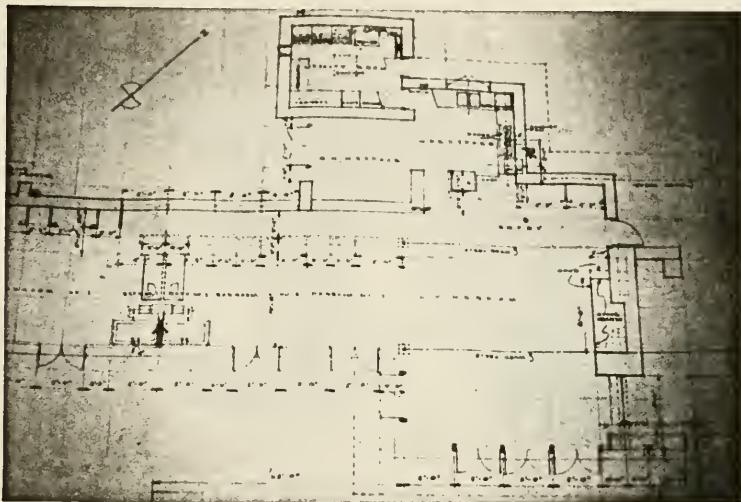


Fig. 3.22 Edward Serlin House, floorplan (1949)



Fig. 3.23 Edward Serlin House, exterior



Fig. 3.24 Frank Lloyd Wright and David Henken (1950)

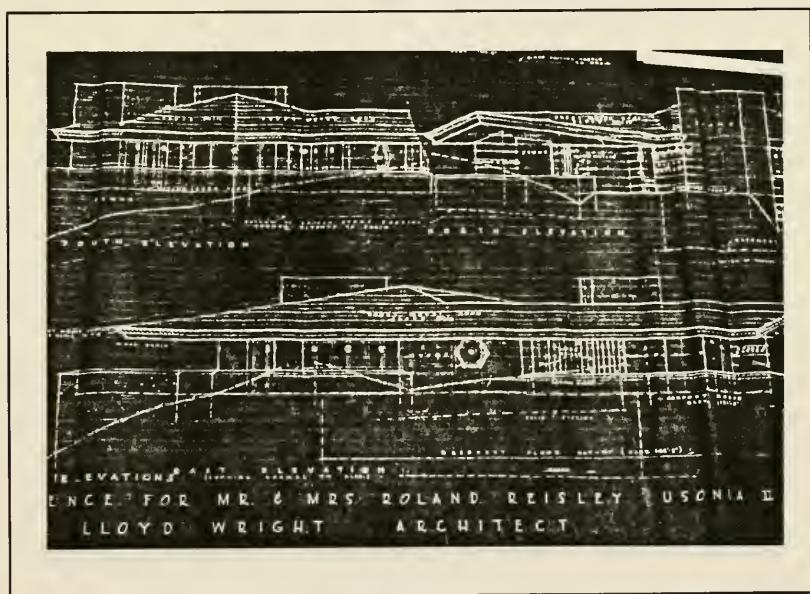


Fig. 3.25 Roland Reisley House

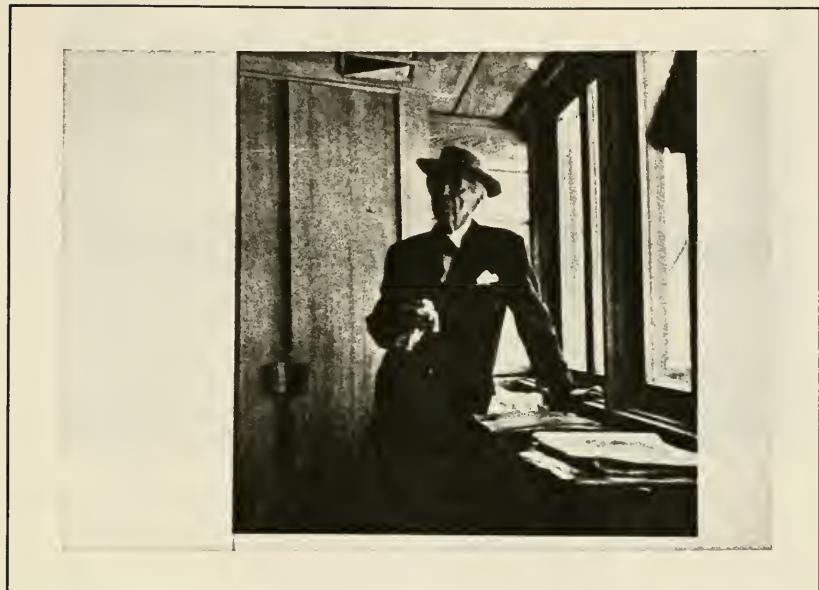


Fig. 3.26 Frank Lloyd Wright in the Roland Reisley House (1951)



Fig. 3.27 Roland Reisley House



Fig. 3.28
Roland Reisley
House

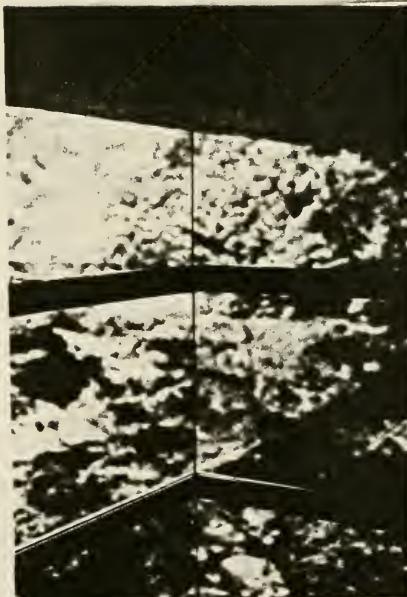


Fig. 3.29
Corner window

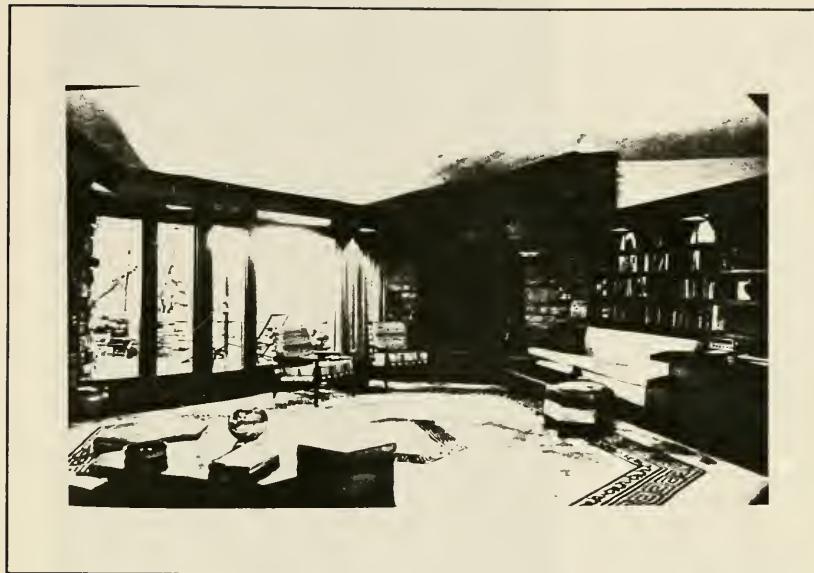


Fig. 3.30 Roland Reisley House, interior

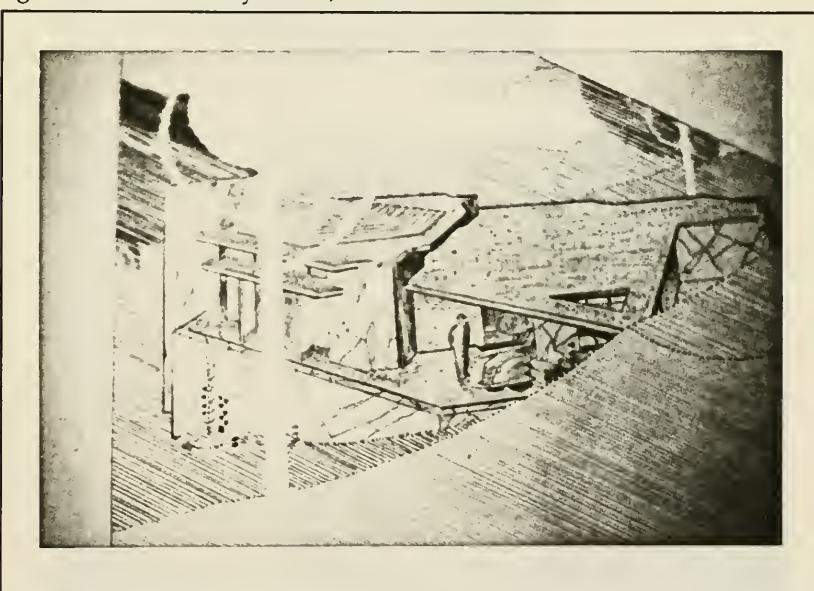


Fig. 3.31 Irwin Auerbach House, project (1948)

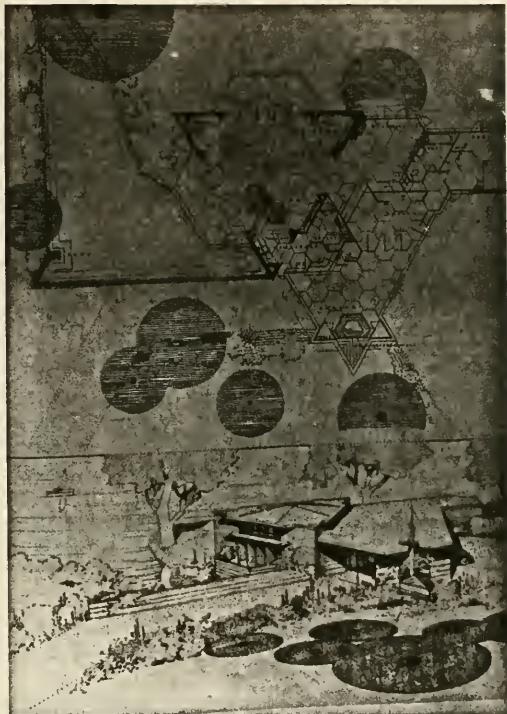


Fig. 3.32
Roy Peterson
House, Madison,
Wisconsin (1942)

Fig. 3.33
Irwin Auerbach
House, floorplan

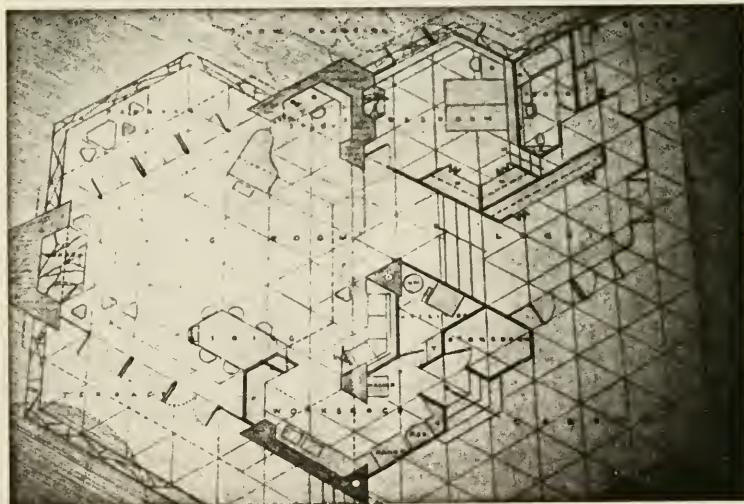




Fig. 3.34 Sidney Miller House, plan and elevation (1948)

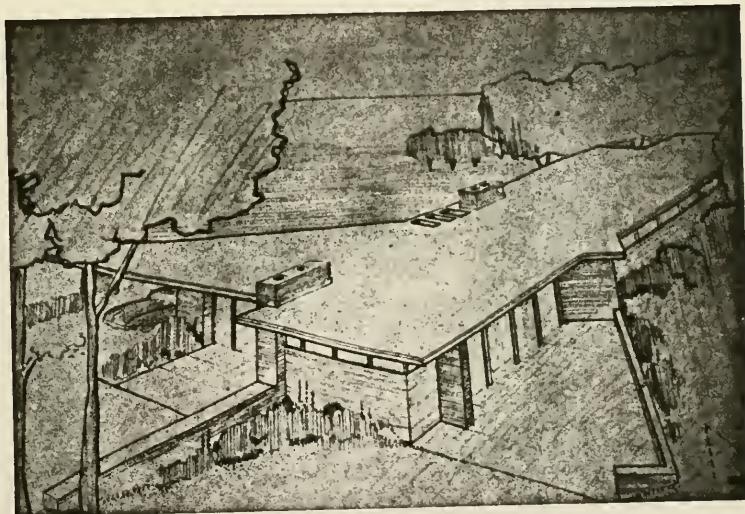


Fig. 3.35 Sidney Miller House, elevation (1953)

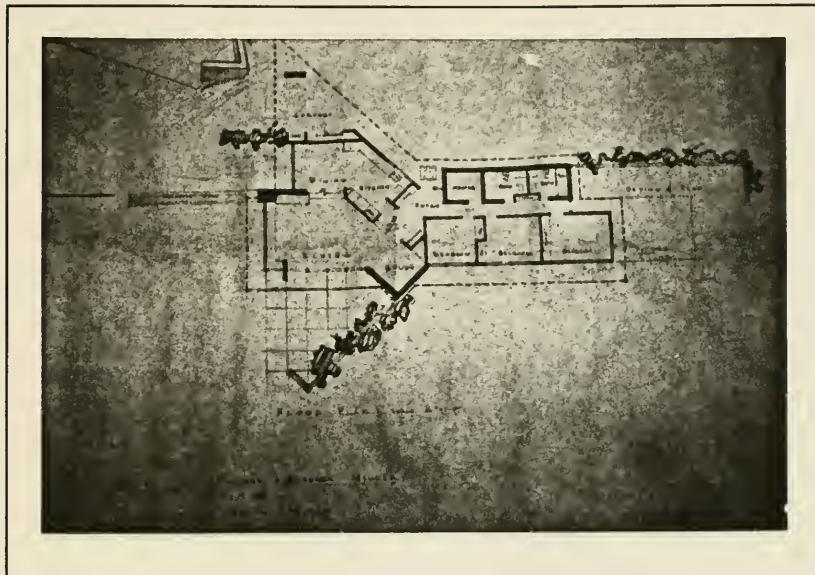


Fig. 3.36 Sidney Miller House, plan



Fig. 3.37 Henken Builds, Inc. sign

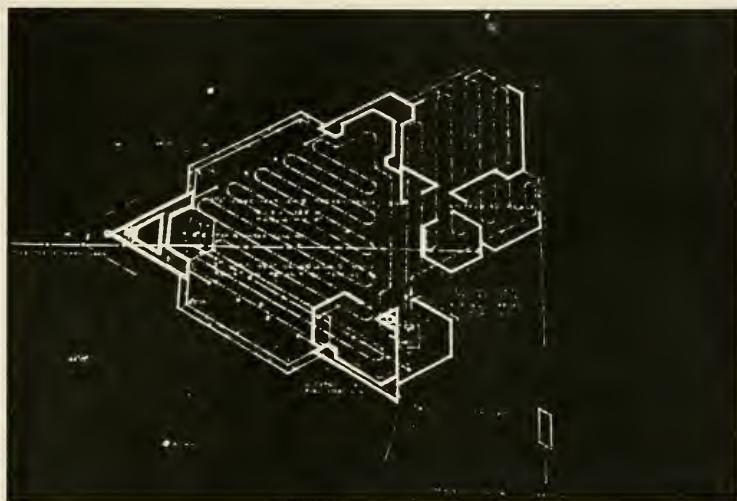


Fig. 3.38 Gravity Heating System in the Auerbach House

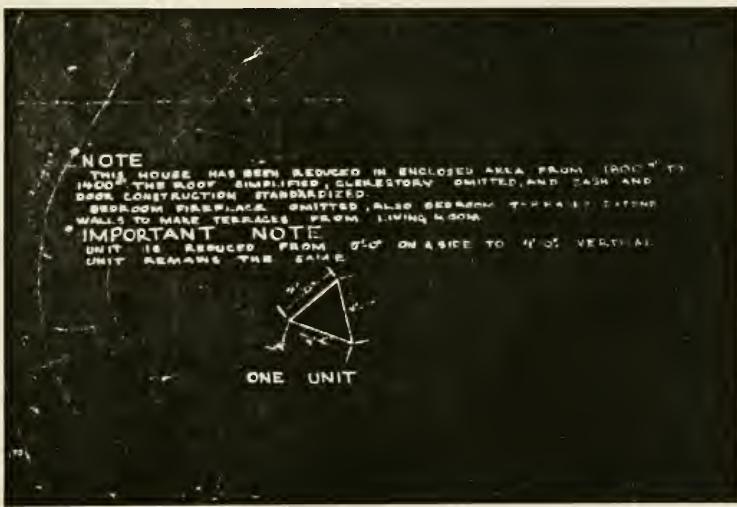


Fig. 3.39 Module of the Auerbach House

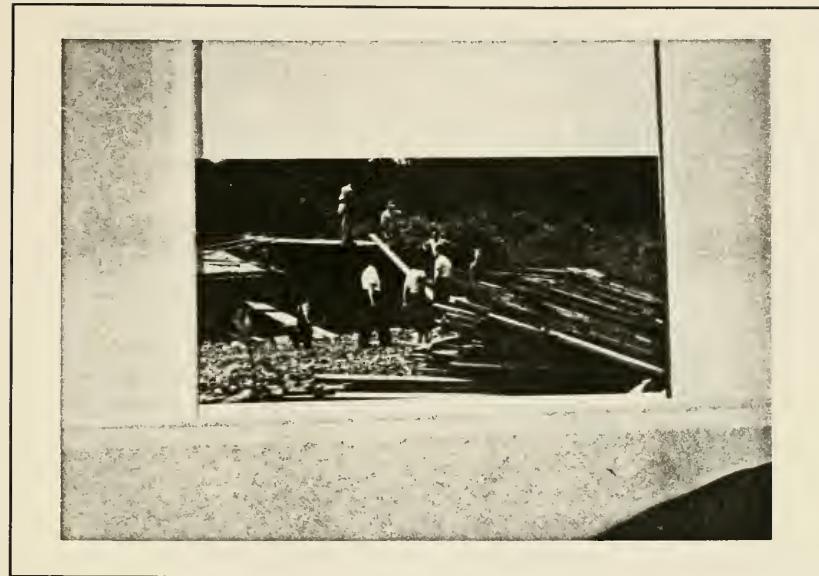


Fig. 3.40 Construction materials for Usonia II



Fig. 3.41 Usonian Exhibit House (1953)

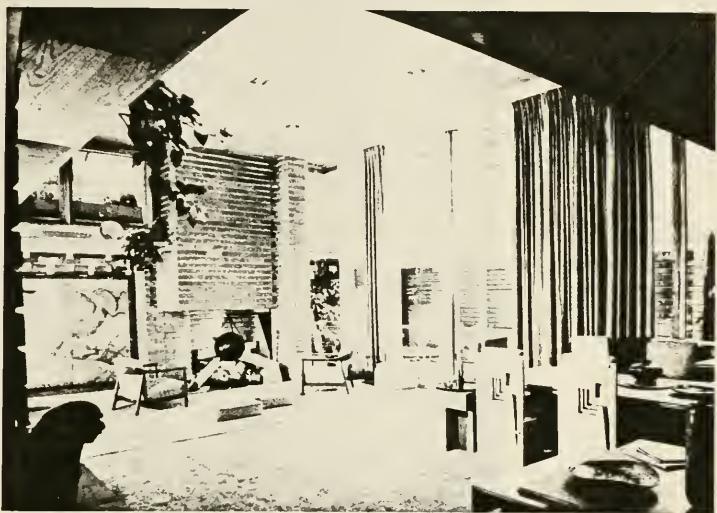


Fig. 3.42 Usonian Exhibit House, interior

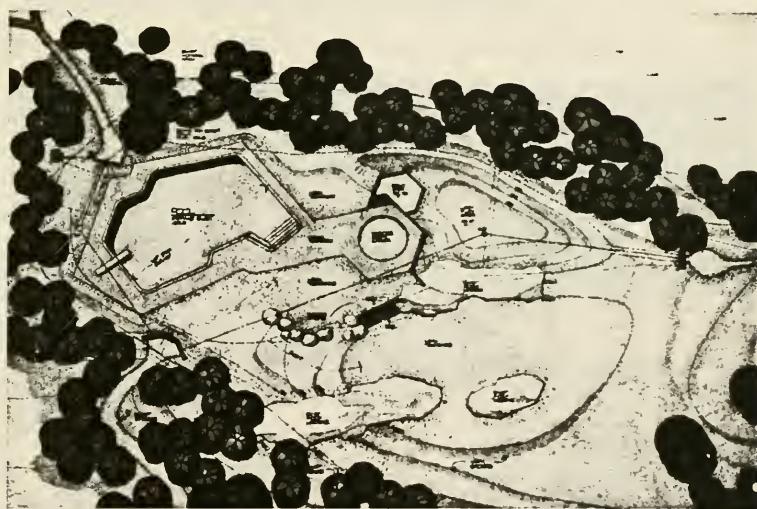


Fig. 3.43 Plan for Orchard Brook Club (1973)



Fig. 3.44
Advertisement for
a Usonia II house
(1990)



Fig. 3.45
Heritage Hills

APPENDIX ONE

Correspondence

The correspondence between Frank Lloyd Wright and his clients are among the Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities collection in Santa Monica, California. The Frank Lloyd Wright letters have been indexed by Anthony Alofsin, editor of Frank Lloyd Wright: An Index of the Tales in Correspondence, vols 1-5. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1988. The number listings after the letters are the Getty's indexing code.

David Henken to Frank Lloyd Wright (H065B03)	7/17/42
Usonia Homes, Inc. to Frank Lloyd Wright (H078B03)	12/23/45
Sol Friedman to Frank Lloyd Wright (F073E04)	8/31/48
Frank Lloyd Wright to Sol Friedman (F089B07)	10/23/50
Ottlie Auerbach to Frank Lloyd Wright (A105D11)	12/16/48
Irwin Auerbach to Frank Lloyd Wright (A121D02)	8/4/50
Sidney Miller to Frank Lloyd Wright (M183B09)	11/15/48
Frank Lloyd Wright to David Henken (E080B02)	2/15/54

41-43 39 Place
Sunnyside, New York
July 17, 1942

Mr. Frank Lloyd Wright
Taliesin
Spring Green, Wisconsin

My dear Mr. Wright:

I am writing to ask that I may come to Taliesin and work with you. This is no sudden whim that has come to me. My belief in the brotherhood of man, in the cooperative commonwealth as a means for achieving it, -- in other words my desire for the good life -- has been growing in me steadily through my five years at college and my six years of post-collegiate employment. I have thought long and calmly, and I stand ready to offer myself as an apprentice.

In this day of destruction, it does not seem to me out of place to think of building for the good life. My course of action from college through the present has been set in just that direction. As a graduate mechanical engineer, I refused to lend my training to the machinery of war. In the field of industrial design, I worked particularly with sheet materials, developing new forms through inventions in flexion. This had its practical application in the design for mass production of packages and displays made stronger and lighter by these new methods. I am working now in the research and development laboratories of a company which specializes in architectural and theatrical lighting.

I do not expect that this body of experience wholly prepares me for the work I must do with you. I need your leadership and your guidance. Given these, I feel that I can grow and make my contribution. Perhaps you will want to know that my wife understands and concurs thoroughly with my plans. After making provision for her, there is very

(S)

little I can offer you in a monetary way now.
By my labors during and after my apprenticeship,
I hope amply to repay you.

I await your response eagerly.

Yours very truly,

David T. Henken

David T. Henken

USONIA HOMES

- A COOPERATIVE, INCORPORATED

December 23, 1945

Mr. Frank Lloyd Wright
Taliesin
Spring Green, Wisconsin

Dear Mr. Wright,

In accordance with our fully conversation about the cooperative, we are asking our attorney to prepare the contract between you and the cooperative.

Supervised As you remember, we wanted you to be the architect of our cooperative, to ~~design the~~ ^{at least} the ~~general~~ ^{building setting} ~~general~~ layout and the community buildings, ~~and to be the~~ ^{to be the} consultant architect for those homes not designed by you. However, because of the great press of your work, we reached this agreement:

- 1) That you will be the consultant architect of the cooperative ~~and building setting~~ ^{building setting}
- 2) That you will determine the general design scheme, i.e. lay out the ~~general~~ ^{building} position of the plots, the homes, and the community buildings on our land.
- 3) That you will design at least the community center.
- 4) That you will design whatever homes you desire, depending on your inclination, time, and convenience.
- 5) That you will go over the drawings submitted by other architects to insure that they fit into the general design scheme.
- 6) That you will be reimbursed for your design work at the ~~rate of~~ ^{the} ~~amount of~~ ^{amount of} ~~percentage of~~ ^{percentage of} ~~fees charged~~ ^{fees charged} ~~paid according to statement having~~ ^{paid according to statement having} ~~been agreed upon~~ ^{been agreed upon} ~~between us at the time~~ ^{between us at the time} ~~such amount due is paid~~ ^{such amount due is paid}.
- 7) That you will be reimbursed for your consulting work at the ~~rate of~~ ^{the} ~~amount of~~ ^{amount of} ~~percentage of~~ ^{percentage of} ~~fees charged~~ ^{fees charged} ~~paid according to statement having~~ ^{paid according to statement having} ~~been agreed upon~~ ^{been agreed upon} ~~between us at the time~~ ^{between us at the time} ~~such amount due is paid~~ ^{such amount due is paid}.

I have listed these so that you may verify them for the benefit of Judge Dorothy Kenyon, our attorney.

This long delay in writing to you is not attributable to negligence on the part of the cooperative, but to my own extreme busyness trying to cramp thirty-six hours of work into a normal day, and of course, the preparations for the baby.

We are going full steam ahead. The topographical survey should be ready this spring, and the active design of the forty individual homes should begin this summer. We are anxious, therefore, for our working agreement to be completed shortly.

I trust all is glowingly well with you and yours this holiday season, and that a happy and fruitful year lies ahead. The warmest regards from Princeton and Jonathan.

Yours sincerely,

Frank Lloyd Wright

255 WEST 88TH STREET NEW YORK 24 N Y

Dear Friedmans: Here's the happy little house -
late but better than ever.

Thinking the program rather heavy for these high
cost times we have given you two bedrooms upstairs -
double decker in each, your own room and guest
below. Another small room could be squeezed in if
necessary or guest room used for children - guest
sleeping on balcony in mezzanine.

The L. R. is large because it is Porch, L.R., D.R.,
etc., in one space.

Nothing particularly expensive about it.

The car shelter necessitates a short space kept
clear to reach the front door but I like the car to
one side rather than part of the house. I hope you
agree.

Sincerely yours,

Frank Lloyd Wright

August 31st, 1948

My dear Friedman: We are sending you six lamps
lamps I hope you will like - 2 for setting
on tables, 4 for standing on floor. They
are good but inexpensive -- and now:

Ted wants a settlement for his services to
me on your house and I've not yet billed
you except for original estimate. Ted
says the house cost \$80,000.00 but I think
that is too much. \$67,500.00 ought to be
enough if my opinion for house, car shelter
and furniture.

Accordingly herewith is Architect's bill for
80 percent of \$67,500.00. Kindly give
Ted \$875.00 out of this sum for my share
of his compensation as superintendent.
And if you can do so kindly send me the
balance - \$3,675.00. Just now we are
"collecting" to pay for more ground to work
on at Gallesin.

We will send you any help you may need from
now on and I feel so try we couldn't have

been nearer to you all the time.

The name for the house is now in order
and should I think have the word "toy"
in it - say "Toyland" - or what, I wonder,
Do you have something?

We will have some beautiful photographs soon
for publication in the Times, the Forum and the
Italian Show -

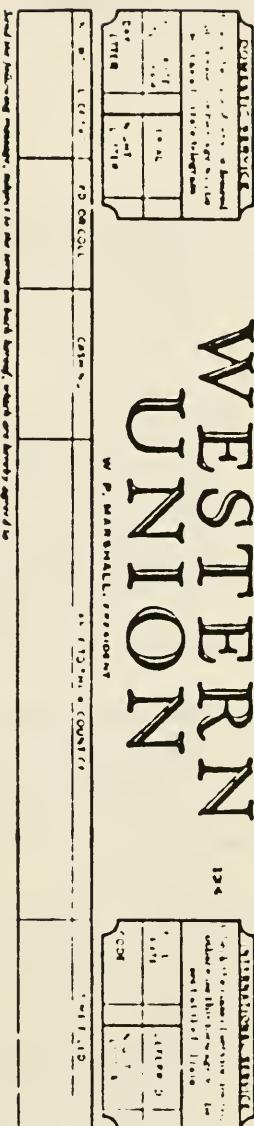
My best to you both and your little brood -

Sincerely yours,

Frank Lloyd Wright

October 23rd, 1960

1103. *Leucostoma*
Alte dem Wetzstein
Tod für Dich, Tod für mich
Gott und du sind doch



WESTERN UNION

AUGUST 1911

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LA JETÉE DU GÉANT (1962) 13

\$26,500. " 4. 37 " 100. \$23,366.6 0 100. 31 " 100.

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Some in another States
1860

November 15, 1948

Dear Mr. Wright:

We spoke with David re your letter to him about our house. We understand that with present building costs \$11,000. is a tight figure for a good house. We arrived at that figure on the basis of estimating costs at \$10. a Sq. ft. and figuring our minimum requirements at 1100 sq. ft.

On rechecking we see that 1100 sq. ft. will not give us the kind of house we outlined to you and we have decided that the \$15,000. you mentioned can probably be worked out. Because the bonus-type salary I've been receiving makes our financial situation indefinite, we would like you to suggest in your plans a portion of the house which could be eliminated from the immediate building next spring, should this become absolutely necessary. We're assuming that in your note to David you meant that the house you plan for us as minimum living standards would run more than 1100 sq. ft. and not that your estimates of building costs will run much over \$10. a sq. ft.

From close association with other members and their building problems we find that the figure of \$10. a sq. ft. is being met only where the architects have stuck to extreme simplicity of design and have taken advantage of every possible economy consistent with aesthetics and good building. Which brings us to our next problem. We recognize that even a 1400-1500 sq. ft. house is not the house we want to be living in in four or five years. We're optimistic enough about our future to feel we will have more money to spend and we will want to spend it in building for ourselves as beautiful and spacious a home as possible. We do not want, therefore, in building now a minimum house to build one that will have to be completely rebuilt. Specifically: Is it better economically to build now a living room of say 300 sq. ft. and break walls through later, or to have a living room of about 600 sq. ft. and drop one of the two smaller bedrooms? Again, should we cut down on area in favor of keeping some of the esthetic features of a more complicated plan we would admire such as high sloped ceilings, clerestory windows, skylight, many-angled design, etc. because such features would be more expensive and difficult to add later than area?

In connection with the design again: although we thought Friedman's plans beautiful indeed, we would prefer an angular plan, which we find personally more dramatic and satisfying, of the type, for instance, of your Katherine Winckler ~~1~~ Alma Goetsch house in Okemos, Mich., 1939, and the Sidney ~~1~~ Miller house in Hillsborough, Calif., 1940.

Another matter that has been troubling us is that although we have a beautiful sloped site, we did not realize when we chose it that the slope runs down east and north. Will this make it impossible to utilize the beautiful view in those directions?

We need your help in answering these questions. We will ~~now~~ rely heavily on your discretion -- in fact, we would like you to go ahead immediately on the plans, but we would appreciate your letting us know as soon as you can how you have resolved our problems!

Yours sincerely,

Sidney - Barbara Miller

Sidney and Barbara Miller
East 14 Street, 107
York 9

Will try to work it ~~out~~ ^{out} so the contradictions in terms won't matter too much - the more ~~only~~ ^{only} assume them as the ~~satisfactory~~ ^{satisfactory} we will send you

Mr. David T. Henken
Usonia Homes
Pleasantville, N. Y.

David: For supreme gaul and rhinoceros hide you win. You sold yourself to me (for a second trial) to build the Museum pavilion, under similar false-pretences that I tell for in Usonia Homes: you had neither qualifications nor equipment as you represented them. Fully two thirds of the unexpected costs and delays involved can be charged to your lack of equipment and incompetence. You actually made few, or no favorable contracts at all nor did you communicate these to me correctly as actual construction turned out. Now why, David, does not some sense of failure get to you. To save the day I had to come down and go into it all myself to get practically everything we really got or - no show. Now you tolled up bills.

That I didn't throw you out when I gradually discovered all this you can charge to your profit on this job. Well, you got what you wanted. The Museum owes you nothing because I owe you nothing. If there was any way to collect out of your hide for the direct advertising you devised and received by way of direct advertising for others by way of your own self-advertisement, I would subscribe to that. But there is no such way. So take it and get away with it.

Page two: David Henken

For me to throw more good time and temper away after the loss already inflicted on me by my foolish trust in you, I am sending a copy of this note to the Museum together with a copy of your own letter with the definite recommendation that they do not pay you one cent more.

Should the Museum trustees wish to reimburse those who really did contribute a real sacrifice to the affair, that is only fair. But I recommend that reimbursement take the direction of simple justice.

This "triumph of hope over experience" by me in your case is as never before.

Frank Lloyd Wright

February 15th, 1964

APPENDIX TWO

Design Panel Architects

The Design Panel of Usonia Homes, Inc. consisted of 12 architects with Wright in an *ex officio* position. An article by David Henken, "Usonia Homes...A Summing Up," (1985) lists the following men as members of the Design Panel and much of the information of the men who were also Taliesin Fellows was taken from Elizabeth B. Kassler's *The Taliesin Fellowship: A Directory of Members* (1981). In November of 1948, the Design Panel prepared drawings of standard house features for the members of Usonia. The items included were kitchen cabinets, shelves, casement windows, doors, and door knobs. The most prolific members of the Panel were David Henken and Aaron Resnick, each man designing fifteen houses. This skew is due to their presence in the community. Since they lived in Usonia, they were readily accessible to aid in the design of new members' residences.

Robert Bishop, FAIA (1908-90) was at Taliesin from July of 1932 until March of 1935, and is attributed with the construction of 200 buildings. He was on the staff of the University of Pennsylvania's School of Architecture between 1952 and 1960. Bishop spent the remainder of his life in Southampton, Pennsylvania a cooperative community designed in 1940.

Theodore "Ted" Dixon Bower (1922-) was a student at Taliesin from September of 1941 until June 1946 and rejoined Wright's atelier in November 1947 and left in July 1948. Ted, as he is referred to in Wright's letters, supervised the construction of the Sol Friedman house. He went on to work in Chandigarh, India and then settled in Seattle.

Kaneji Domoto is currently living in New Rochelle, New York; he was at Taliesin in 1939. He had four designs executed in Usonia II.

Alden B. Dow, FAIA (1904-), of Midland, Michigan was at Taliesin from April until September of 1933. A charter member and Fellow of the group, but he was never called on to design a Usonia II house.

David Henken, (1915-85), a mechanical engineer and the organizer of the Pleasantville project, where he designed fifteen houses. He went on to campus planning and worked on the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, New York and Nassau College in Long Island, New York.

John Lautner, FAIA (1911-), was at Taliesin from 1933 until 1939 and has had a large private practice in Los Angeles, California since 1946. He was recently featured in a February 1991 *Architectural Digest* article.

Aaron Resnick, FAIA (1913-85), was originally an engineer and became an architect in 1953. He went on to found and develop the architecture school at the New York Institute of Technology in 1965. Resnick designed fifteen houses in Usonia including, and also designed several additions in the community.

Paul Schweikher and Winston Elting of Roselle, Illinois designed one house for Usonia II.

The partnership of Charles Warner and Harold Leeds of New York City, designed two houses for Usonia Homes, Inc.

Marcus Weston (1915-) of Spring Green, Wisconsin was a Taliesin Fellow from 1938 to 1942 and again for three months in 1946. The years between his fellowships were spent in prison for his conscientious objection to World War II. Weston did not design any of the Usonia II houses.

APPENDIX THREE

Declaration of Usonia

DECLARATION OF RESTRICTIONS UPON LAND
OF USONIA HOMES - A COOPERATIVE, INC.

USONIA HOMES - A COOPERATIVE, INC., a corporation organized and existing under the laws of the State of New York, having its principal place of business at No. 125 Broadway, in the City, County and State of New York, is the owner of a tract of land with the buildings and improvements thereon, located in the Town of Mt. Pleasant, Westchester County, New York, adjoining Kensico Reservoir, which tract of land was conveyed to it by Deeds recorded in Westchester County Clerk's Office (Division of Land Records) in liber 4488 of Conveyances, page 326, liber 4488 of Conveyances, page 357, and liber 4772 of Conveyances, page 89, and which it is developing as a Community by subdividing into plots and erecting homes thereon and leasing such plots and the buildings thereon to its stockholders by proprietary leases and

It hereby declares that it restricts said land in the following manner:

1. All proprietary leases made by Usonia Homes - A Cooperative, Inc. for any and all plots in said community shall contain the following covenants and agreements:

A. USONIA shall maintain and keep in good repair the roads, water supply system, community buildings and facilities intended for general use in the COMMUNITY, it being agreed that the TENANT shall give to USONIA prior notice of any accident or defect requiring such repairs to be made. The TENANT shall maintain and keep in good order and repair the house, outbuildings, grounds, driveways, sewage disposal and water supply systems and facilities as or appurtenant to the PREMISES.

B. The Board of Directors of USONIA shall have discretionary power to prescribe the manner of maintaining and operating the COMMUNITY.

C. The TENANT shall not erect nor permit, procure or suffer to be erected on the PREMISES or any part

thereof any building other than a one-family year-round dwelling and outbuildings approved by USONIA, nor alter nor make any change in the design or structure of said dwelling or outbuildings, nor, in so far as the parcel is wooded, clear the parcel or cut wood, nor fence in his property nor prevent the free passage over it of other tenants of USONIA, without the approval of USONIA, nor use or occupy or permit the PREMISES to be used or occupied for any tenement or multiple family dwelling or for any public institution or establishment or place of amusement or for any trade, business or factory or any dangerous, noxious or offensive purpose out of keeping with the general character and purpose of the development, which is the establishment and maintenance of a high-class cooperative housing community made up of individual homes, each having the same rights and restrictions as are herein contained; provided, however that the office of a doctor, artist, lawyer or any other customary home occupation shall be permitted as an incidental use when not located outside of dwelling house, provided there is no display or advertisement of any kind other than the ordinary small name plate.

D. The TENANT shall promptly comply with and execute all laws, ordinances, rules, orders, and regulations of the Town, federal, state, county and municipal governments, and of all other authorities, and of their departments and bureaus, and all rules, orders, regulations or requirements of the Board of Fire Underwriters or any similar body applicable to the PREMISES, or concerning any matter in, upon or connected with the PREMISES.

E. USONIA shall not erect or permit to be erected on adjoining Premises or Community Land any buildings or other structures within fifty feet of any building or outbuilding existing in the PREMISES or hereafter erected on the PREMISES with the permission of USONIA; and unless the Board of Directors by a two-thirds vote so direct, USONIA shall not erect or permit to be erected on adjoining Premises or Community Land, without the permission of the TENANT, any buildings or other structures within seventy-five feet of any building or outbuilding existing on the PREMISES or hereafter erected on the PREMISES with the permission of USONIA.

F. The TENANT shall have access to and use of all the community roads located on the larger tract of land known as THE USONIA COMMUNITY, of which the PREMISES herewith leased forms a part, on an equal basis with all other tenants of USONIA renting similar parcels of said larger tract. USONIA will construct and maintain such roads. The cost of annual maintenance, repair and replacement of such roads shall be borne and paid on a proportionate basis by the respective tenants of the leased parcels above described and shall be a part of the rent therefor. The PREMISES herein leased shall be and remain bound and chargeable for all such costs which, if not paid when due, shall be and become a lien thereon.

G. The TENANT shall have access to and use of the water supply system located on the larger tract of land known as THE USONIA COMMUNITY, of which the PREMISES herewith

leased forms a part, on an equal basis with all other : of USONIA renting similar parcels of said larger tract. USONIA will construct and maintain such a water suppli. tem. The cost of annual maintenance, repair and rem. ent of such water supply system shall be borne and .. a proportionate basis by the respective tenants of the leased parcels above described and shall be a part of rent therefor. The PREMISES herein leased shall be .. main bound and chargeable for all such costs which, if .. paid when due, shall be and become a lien thereon.

H. The TENANT shall have access to and .. the general community facilities (recreation areas, etc. located on the larger tract of land known as THE USONI. MUNITY, of which the PREMISES herewith leased forms a .. on an equal basis with all other tenants of USONIA of .. similar leased parcels of said larger tract, provided .. TENANT pays, and continues to pay when due, to USONIA .. proportionate share of the development and annual main. tenance costs of said facilities. USONIA reserves the .. right to make such rules and regulations as in its judg. may from time to time be needed for the safety, care and .. cleanliness of the PREMISES and COMMUNITY, and for the .. servation of good order and comfort therein, and the Ten. agrees faithfully and punctually to observe and comply .. such regulations.

2. The covenants and agreements above set for. to be included in all proprietary leases of plots in the .. Community, are restrictive covenants and run with the lan. and shall be held to bind not only Tenants under said le. but all persons now or hereafter occupying the said prop. either as owner, tenant, mortgages or otherwise.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, USONIA HOMES - A COOPERATIVE. INC. has caused its corporate seal to be hereunto affix .. and these presents to be signed by its duly authorized .. officers the 17th day of March , 1950.

USONIA HOMES - A COOPERATIVE,

By John Stevenson
President

Jack Way
Secretary



STATE OF NEW YORK)
) ss.:
COUNTY OF NEW YORK)

On the 17th day of March, 1950, before me came JOHN J. NASSON, to me known, who, being by me duly sworn, did depose and say that he resides at 190 West 168th St, Bronx, New York that he is the President of USONIA HOMES - A COOPERATIVE, INC., the corporation described in and which executed the foregoing instrument; that he knows the seal of said corporation; that the seal affixed to said instrument is such corporate seal; that it was so affixed by order of the Board of Directors of said corporation; and that he signed his name thereto by like order.

Max Randolph

Notary Public

MAX RANDOLPH
NOTARY PUBLIC STATE OF NEW YORK
License No. 100-000000000000000000
Cert No. 100-000000000000000000
L. T. C. City No. 17, Reg. No. 172-R-0
Kings Co. City No. 154, Reg. No. 209-R-0
Bronx Co. City No. 25, Reg. No. 3d-R-0
Monroe Co. City No. 210, Reg. No. 132-R-0
Commission Expires March 31, 1950

The foregoing instrument was endorsed for record as follows: The property affected by this instrument is in the TOWN OF MT. PLEASANT of Westchester, N. Y. A true copy of the original DECLARATION OF RESTRICTIONS DATED Mar. 21, 1950 at 2:44 P. M. at request of T. G. & T. CO.

\$ 4.05

No. 9400

ROBERT J. FIELD, County Clerk

APPENDIX FOUR

Survey of Usonian Residents

The following is a survey sent by the author to the forty-four residents of Usonia II who she had not yet interviewed. It was sent out January 21, 1990, along with a cover letter and a self-addressed stamped envelop. Unaware of an upcoming postal rate increase, the author put 25¢ stamps of the envelops, which may account for the speedy return of letters. Twenty-two of the surveys were answered, many with pages of additional comments. The original survey was a single page.

Names and ages of all family members: _____

How did you first hear about Usonia ? What specifically attracted you to the site ?

Are you the original owner of your house ? Y N

If not, how long have you been living in your present residence ? _____ years
and do you know who the previous owner was ? _____

Do you know what year your house was constructed ? 19____

Who was the architect ? R Bishop T D Bower K Domoto A Dow D Henken
J Lautner A Resnick P Schweiker & W Elting C Warner & H Leeds
M Weston F LL Wright J Wright Other _____

What is your occupation ? _____

Were you interviewed by the membership committee ? Y N

If yes, do you remember any of the questions, or discuss the interview process.

What are the positive aspects of Usonia (both past and present) ?

What are the negative aspects of Usonia (both past and present) ?

Do you have any relatives also living in Usonia ? Y N

If yes, could you list them and their relation to you.

Do you see Usonia as a successful settlement ? Y N

On the back of this page (or a separate sheet) please comment on the following.

- David Henken, Frank Lloyd Wright, and their philosophies.
- The construction/design of your house.
- The reactions of outsiders to Usonia.
- How do you see Usonia changing ?
- What would you like to see happen to Usonia in the future ?

Names and ages of all family members: RONALD REISLEY, 66
ROSALYN 64, ROBERT 33

How did you first hear about Usonia? What specifically attracted you to the site?

From my father, who knew Judith Rodell (David Henken's sister)
We were immediately enthusiastic about Usonia: Philosophy,
Architecture, People, Land

Are you the original owner of your house? Y N

If not, how long have you been living in your present residence? 39 years

and do you know who the previous owner was?

Do you know what year your house was constructed? 1951-57

Who was the architect? R Bishop T D Bower K Domoto A Dow D Henken

J Lautner A Resnick P Schweiker & W Elting C Warner & H Leeds

M Weston FLL Wright J Wright Other

What is your occupation? Retired (Physician-entrepreneur, wife: school psychologist)

Were you interviewed by the membership committee? Y N

If yes, do you remember any of the questions, or discuss the interview process.

Questions sought to determine attitude/compatibility with Usonia's philosophy.

What are the positive aspects of Usonia (both past and present)? Cooperation, aesthetics, "rainbow"

Usonia members became deeply bonded to home and community, truly

an extended family. So as needs changed members remodeled homes, declined, is

What are the negative aspects of Usonia (both past and present)?

None; I or not, none

Do you have any relatives also living in Usonia? Y N

If yes, could you list them and their relation to you.

Do you see Usonia as a successful settlement? Y! N
Uniquely, remarkably

On the back of this page (or a separate sheet) please comment on the following.

1. - David Henken, Frank Lloyd Wright, and their philosophies.
2. - The construction/design of your house.
3. - The reactions of outsiders to Usonia.
4. - How do you see Usonia changing?
5. - What would you like to see happen to Usonia in the future?

1. David Henken's dream of a cooperative, modern, affordable suburban community was significantly enhanced by his apprenticeship to Wright who, in his Kahn Lectures(1931) and later elaboration on Broadacre City, and his development of Usonian architecture, had set forth the ideas that became the guidelines of our Usonia community.
2. Our home has been unbelievably satisfying. To feel uplifted by something beautiful--every day--for 40 years--Wow! It works very well and is easily maintained. Mr. Wright was very kind and responsive to us. He gave us a jewel.
3. Architects, planners and more recently historians show much interest and appreciation. In the beginning, late 40's-50's, many locals regarded us with some suspicion: "radical houses and people". Gradually that passed and now many see Usonia as a "point of interest".
4. Age takes it's toll. In 40 years only 13 of 48 homes changed hands, 6 of them to 2nd generation Usonians. But after the great efforts, emotional and tangible investment of the early years, most of us now take the benefits for granted. For people in their 70's and 80's infirmity can displace interest in community as a priority. A number of homes must soon be sold and unless we do something to reemphasize community values and principles--and despite our by-laws and covenants--they may be regarded simply as real estate.
5. Usonia should be Landmarked, Historic Registered, Preserved. But many owners/buyers feel threatened by that. I am working on a comprehensive documentation and history of this remarkable community. Historians and libraries have expressed interest and I am hopeful that in book form Usonia may be rediscovered by a growing public interested in Frank Lloyd Wright, Usonian architecture and related quality of life community values.

Names and ages of all family members: JAMES ANDERSON, 70
MARGERY ANDERSON, 66

How did you first hear about Usonia? What specifically attracted you to the site?

An article in PM newspaper. It not only talked about modern architecture and cooperatives, but also seemed to be within our economic reach.

Are you the original owner of your house? Y N

If not, how long have you been living in your present residence? _____ years

and do you know who the previous owner was? _____

Do you know what year your house was constructed? 1952

Who was the architect? R Bishop T D Bower K Domoto A Dow D Henken

J Lautner A Resnick P Schweiker & W Elting C Warner & H Leeds

M Weston F LL Wright J Wright Other _____

What is your occupation? Technical service in Spectroscopy

Were you interviewed by the membership committee? Y N

If yes, do you remember any of the questions, or discuss the interview process.

See Note 1

What are the positive aspects of Usonia (both past and present)?

See Note 2

What are the negative aspects of Usonia (both past and present)?

See Note 3

Do you have any relatives also living in Usonia? Y N

If yes, could you list them and their relation to you.

Do you see Usonia as a successful settlement? Y N

On the back of this page (or a separate sheet) please comment on the following.

6 NOTES:

- 4 - David Henken, Frank Lloyd Wright, and their philosophies.
- 5 - The construction/design of your house.
- 6 - The reactions of outsiders to Usonia.
- 7 - How do you see Usonia changing?
- 8 - What would you like to see happen to Usonia in the future?

January 26, 1991

Response to Ciorsdan Conran

Questionnaire on Usonia

Much of what is asked cannot be answered with just a few words.

1. On questions asked during the interview process—Since we did not want to appear unable to accept people with different ideas, the most difficult question was whether or not we would accept a fascist as a member. The question also included acceptance of a communist, but I recall more problem with the former. We were also asked about accepting other religions or races, but this did not seem to pose much problem to Usonia prospects. (One disappointment is that we have been unable to attract many blacks and failed to have any live in Usonia.)

2. Positive aspects—In early days it was the real sense of having to work together on a common cause, for we came very close to foundering. There were two strong attractions: the modern, Wright inspired architecture and the cooperative community based on Rochdale principles. Cooperation at that time included actual attempts at "hands on" building, probably often to the dismay of our general contractor, purchasing materials in bulk, using early investments by all members to get a few houses started, offering anonymous financial aid to members who needed it, and fending off creditors. Although we presently are far from being the cooperative we once were, a strong sense of community remains. Mutual help is now neighbor to neighbor. But community help can still be expected in emergency situations. A worthwhile feature that has been maintained is that no family is forced to participate in either the community tennis court or the swimming pool.

3. Negative aspects—Nothing came in as inexpensively as anticipated. Some choices on the purchase of bulk materials ultimately proved to be mistakes. Financial problems between members and resident architects became acute, resulting in one architect and his father and mother being dropped from Usonia membership, although they still were able to maintain their houses in Usonia.

4a. David Henken—We were attracted to his innovative ideas. He was hard to deal with however. If you happened to be on friendly relations, as we were, he was a helpful. If you were a disappointed client, he had little sympathy with complaints about excessive architect fees when building costs sky-rocketed.

4b. Frank Lloyd Wright—Although we admired his ideas and skill as an architect and designer, we avoided joining the fawning retinue that followed him on one of his rare visits. His ego was enormous. Although we had a design panel which was supposed to get Wright's approval on any house built in Usonia, it soon became apparent that approval only meant that he would not stamp his feet and say no to another architect's plans. (It has been disappointing that the banks forced us to forsake the simple layout of circular plots that Wright laid out.)

Names and ages of all family members: Virginia S. Parker, 67; James T. Parker, 73;
Bruce J. Parker, 39; Carol L. Parker, 36 -- both Bruce and Carol are not living here now.

How did you first hear about Usonia? What specifically attracted you to the site?

Feature article in N.Y. Times. Country setting; modern homes individually designed using F.L.Wright concepts; co-op summer playgroup for young children; equal land for all members; no "class" (economic or racial) precepts.

Are you the original owner of your house?

Y

N

If not, how long have you been living in your present residence? _____ years

and do you know who the previous owner was? Nine

Do you know what year your house was constructed?

1952-53

Who was the architect? R Bishop T D Bower K Domoto A Dow D Henken

J Lautner A Resnick P Schweiker & W Elting C Warner & H Leeds

M Weston F LL Wright J Wright Other _____

What is your occupation? Book design and production in N.Y.C. publishers (retired)

Were you interviewed by the membership committee? (Y) N

If yes, do you remember any of the questions, or discuss the interview process.

"Do you intend to raise children? someone asked. (Answerer was "No")

What are the positive aspects of Usonia (both past and present)?

Respect for both individuals and the environment; wide range of members both economically and professionally; liberal political orientation; sense of community aliveness.

What are the negative aspects of Usonia (both past and present)?

Co-ops are given to policy wrangles by their nature but by attempting consensus (variation of Quaker philosophy) much is accomplished.

Do you have any relatives also living in Usonia?

Y

N

If yes, could you list them and their relation to you.

Do you see Usonia as a successful settlement?

Y

N

On the back of this page (or a separate sheet) please comment on the following.

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David Henken: controversial figure, acolyte of F. L. Wright. David's architectural philosophy in practice not realistic in matters of cost.

F. L. Wright: father figure and inspiration for Usonia.

Ours is one of the simplest houses in Usonia -- i.e. no pie-shaped rooms or various ceiling heights. Post and beam construction with field stone used for accent, a "pavilion" feeling. Charlie Warner had just left teaching at Columbia and with young Harold Leeds had designed two notable structures in Manhattan, Bonnier's bookstore and the Paris cinema theatre. We liked both the structures and the architects and after a few conferences we took the leap. Ours is the first house Charlie designed. F. L. Wright still had to approve all Usonia structures then, and he OK'ed our plans adding only two rather expensive changes -- for which we now are grateful.

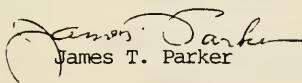
Many people would drive through the Usonia private roads to stop and gawk and to make such comments as "Won't stand up in a storm!" Architectural students often came and were welcome. When our son was about six years old a small group of sight-seers came to peer by pressing noses to windows. He ran out and announced, "My mother says you're very rude!" During the community's earliest years rumors circulated in Pleasantville that Usonia was, at best, a nest of weirdos if not just plain anarchists.

Usonia is changing not only in personnel as older members die or must move away but also as the basic co-operative community concept is diluted by some new members who tend to regard Usonia as a nice financial deal -- notable homes and sites with prestige. Unfortunately these members expect "services" to be handed to them much as "services" are in apartment houses. The idea of everyone's responsibility for Usonia is markedly absent.

Surely Usonia can attract people in the future whose philosophies are more than life here is a bargain. I would like to see Usonia not lose sight of its founders' ideals as a result of inadequate search for replacement members.

Best wishes on your forthcoming MA. Eons ago I received an MA (in American Civilization from Penn.

We'll be available for talking with you while you're in New York January 30th - February 3rd. The best time for us is mid to late Saturday morning, February 2nd; but we expect to be here most of the other days between your two dates. Our phone number is


James T. Parker

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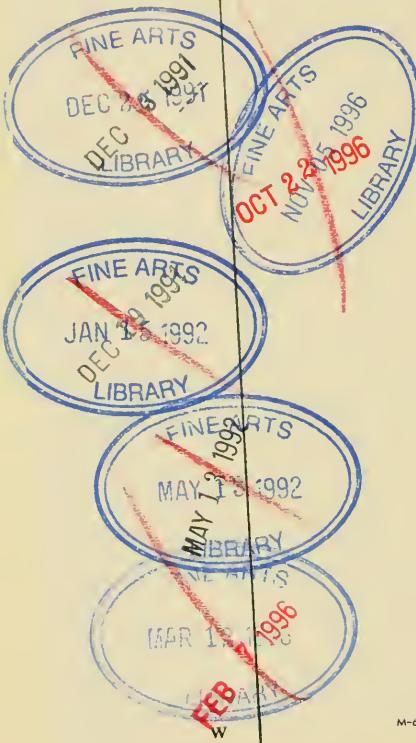
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